

January 25, 1999

Colombian quake kills at least 250

BOGOTA (AFP) — A massive earthquake that shook most of Colombia on Monday has left at least 250 people dead and 3,000 injured, Radionet and Television Caracol reported citing local authorities. In the town of Armenia, in Colombia's coffee region, authorities said that 150 bodies had been recovered. In nearby Pereira at least 50 people died, officials told local media.

...al blessing
likely for sale
of narcotics

JACAN (R)

Paul may be gone, but he is currently a day visit here. "I am the 'flicker' in its official logo, the emblem of the former state of the latter image of a man with a t and black seal, statue is in home. Robins have bed the rich to be now, attracti... m, common cr... m of misfits — o... time drug dealer.

windlers dup...
.S. woman in
inocet scam

ANTIAGO (R)
Windlers duped a...
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to the defense fund of Chile...
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e, 100,000 pesos...
e, 100,000 pesos...
e, the restored gene...
Money was never...
Fischer's a...
Supermother...
to have her...
20th baby

Volume 24 Number 7054

AMMAN TUESDAY, JANUARY 26, 1999, SHAWWAL 9, 1419

Price: Jordan 200 Fils

Jordan Times

An independent Arab political daily published by the Jordan Press Foundation

جورдан تايمز يومية سياسية تصدر بالإنجليزية عن المؤسسة الصحافية الأردنية - الرأي

Five ethnic Albanians found dead in Kosovo

PRISTINA (AP) — The bodies of five slain ethnic Albanians, including two children, were discovered Monday in south-western Kosovo, clouding a new international push to find a political settlement for the province. A spokesman for international peace monitors, Jorgen Grunnet, said the five apparently had been shot by automatic weapons and their car burned. The ethnic Albanian Kosovo Information Centre said the five were killed late Sunday after Serbian police opened fire at them from an armoured car. There was no independent confirmation and no details were available.

King names Prince Abdullah as successor

AMMAN (J.T.) — His Majesty King Hussein I of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, acting under Paragraph A of Article 28 of the Constitution, issued our Royal Decree appointing our eldest son, His Royal Highness Prince Abdullah Ben Al Hussein, as Crown Prince. He shall be vested with all rights and privileges pertaining to this decree.

In his 14-page letter to Prince Hassan, King Hussein said he was forced to intervene from his sickbed to prevent "meddling in the affairs of the Arab Army."

The King also sent a strongly-worded letter to HRH Prince Hassan, 51, who had been the King's designated heir for the last 34 years, explaining the reasons that prompted him to take the decision.

The King appeared to criticise people around Prince Hassan, who he described as "climbers" that "climb on the branch to ruin the relationship between brothers and between father and son."

He accused those "climbers" of trying to "destroy Jordan" and "to instigate infighting in the ranks of the leadership after they failed to dismantle the country's base."

"They find in my being alive an impediment to all their designs..." the King said without identifying those he meant.

The King said that Prince Hassan was opposed to his proposals for succession and who should succeed his brother. "We have differed, and we still do, over the succession and who would suc-

Text of the Royal Decree

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Last night the King received Prince Hassan and Prince Abdullah at his private residence at Bah Al Salam, where Prince Hassan presented the new Crown Prince with the Royal Decree of designation.

The full texts of His Majesty King Hussein's letter to HRH Prince Hassan (dated Jan. 25, 1999) and the letter of Prince Hassan to King Hussein (dated Jan. 21, 1999) follow:

My Dear Brother,
Your Royal Highness
Prince Hassan.
May God protect you,

I am sending you Arath Hashemite greetings with affection and appreciation.

More than thirty years ago, I entrusted you with the position of crown prince.

At that time, a dark atmos-

phere was affecting the whole nation because dangers, rumours and speculations were rife concerning the imminent end of Jordan, a country with a mission, principles and morals, and a

true affiliation to the nation. At the time, we were forced to introduce an amendment to Article 28 of the Constitution so that a brother of the King could assume the post of the

Crown Prince, I chose you for the post with the blessings and approval of my brother. His Royal Highness Prince Mohammad. You have been privileged to hold that post despite the fact that

your brother Mohammad was older than you. My dear brother Mohammad displayed understanding and altruism.

[Continued on page 6)

Prince Abdullah Ben Al Hussein



HRH Crown Prince Abdullah with Their Royal Highnesses Princess Rania, Prince Hussein (C) and Princess Iman (L)

AMMAN (J.T.) — His Royal Highness Prince Abdullah Ben Al Hussein, whose naming as Crown Prince was made public last night, is a career officer in the Jordan Armed Forces. Promoted to the rank of major general in 1998, the 36-year-old Prince is commander of the Special Forces Command.

Prince Abdullah is King Hussein's eldest son by his second wife, Her Royal Highness Princess Muna. Born in Amman in 1962, the Prince started his education at the Islamic Educational College, left for England in 1966 and entered St. Edmund's School in Surrey, then later attended Deerfield Academy in the United States where he completed his high school education.

In 1980, Prince Abdullah joined Britain's Royal Academy at Sandhurst, where he received his military education.

He joined Oxford University for a year, graduating in 1984 for special studies in international politics and world affairs. On returning home in 1984, Prince Abdullah then a first lieutenant served as Platoon Commander and Company 2nd-in-command in the 40th Armoured Brigade. His military service was interrupted twice to attend the School of Foreign Service at Georgetown University in Washington, D.C. where he was in residence as mid-career fel-

low, to attend the all Arms Tactics Course at the British School of Infantry, and the Command and Staff College, Camberley, in the United Kingdom.

As commander of the Special Forces Command, Prince Abdullah led an operation to rout gunmen from their hideout following the killing of eight people in Amman in 1998.

It was much speculation last year that the King was grooming the Prince to take over as land forces chief. While the Prince's interests have focused on the

military — where he is highly respected and supported — he has also acted as Regent in the absence of King Hussein and other Royal family members and has cultivated friendships with the younger members of the Gulf states' ruling families.

It is expected that in assuming the role of Crown Prince, he will gain political experience under the guidance of King Hussein.

Prince Abdullah enjoys car racing like his father, as well as water sports and collecting ancient weapons and

Prince Hassan Ben Talal



Prince Hassan Ben Talal

AMMAN (J.T.) — His Royal Highness Prince Hassan Ben Talal, who was replaced as heir to the Throne Monday, steps down after having witnessed decades of political turbulence in the Middle East and after playing a key role in the political and economic development of the country and in building modern Jordan.

A Royal Decree, signed by His Majesty King Hussein, Prime Minister Fayed Tarawneh, and Interior Minister Nayef Qadi, was issued Monday appointing King Hussein's eldest son, Prince Abdullah, as Crown Prince.

King Hussein named Prince Hassan Crown Prince in 1965 during turbulent times in the region that witnessed assassination attempts on the life of the King.

Since his appointment, Prince Hassan has served as chief political advisor and confidant to King Hussein as well as Regent in his absence.

Prince Hassan has served as Regent for the last six months — the longest period since his appointment — during King Hussein's treatment for cancer in the United States.

A graduate of Oxford with a bachelor's and master's degrees in oriental studies, Prince Hassan has written numerous articles and several books on the Middle East in several languages.

As an Arab intellectual of international repute, Prince Hassan also advocated a new vision for security in the east, promoted dialogue among reli-

gious communities, contributed to a new world code of ethics, and at home promoted science, technology and culture. The well-read Prince has won admirers, primarily among the educated in the country, a factor his critics say, that distanced him from certain sectors.

Prince Hassan's seemingly inexhaustible energy has been focused on a multitude of policy interests.

He has paid a great deal of attention to economic planning, although he was not empowered to make executive decisions. Living in an unstable region, the country's military and security interests often took precedence over economic development plans of the related committees which he chaired.

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Iraq says at least 11 dead, dozens injured in 'savage' U.S. air raids

Agencies

IRAQ REPORTED several dead and dozens injured, including women and children, in a series of "savage" air raids on Monday, while Washington said it only targeted air defences in the north and south.

Iraq holds American and British aggressors and their Kuwaiti and Saudi partners responsible for this cowardly and treacherous aggression," Iraq's Deputy Prime Minister Tareq Aziz said in a statement handed to reporters.

"It [Iraq] will continue to challenge the no-fly ban imposed by force in the south and north," he said.

Iraq linked the escalation to the Arab League's failure, at a meeting of foreign ministers in Cairo the previous day, to condemn the Desert Fox air war waged by Washington and London in December.

Baghdad's official news agency INA charged that U.S. and British warplanes carried out "savage" air raids on civilian and economic targets in southern Iraq, killing a number of civil-

ians. An initial attack in the south left "tens of people" injured and several "killed, including women and children," Information Minister Humam Abdul Khaleq Abdul Ghafour told reporters.

INA said the missiles crashed into a "densely populated" area of Al Jumhuriya near the city of Basra, 500 kilometres from the Iraqi capital.

Ahmad Ibrahim Hamash, the governor of Basra, said that two aircraft fired five missiles that killed 11 people and injuring 59. The missiles struck three civil-

ian areas in or near Basra, as well as a site near the airport and another near the Rumailah oil fields.

An engineer at the oil field was reported injured in the attacks.

Iraqi officials took reporters to the Al Jumhuri hospital, one of the city's two main hospitals. Several injured children and women were at the hospital. Iraqi officials said they were wounded in the strikes.

"At least two residential sites" were hit, INA said, and Basra residents told AFP by telephone that at least 12 people were killed

(Continued on page 3)

Vatican condemns bombings

MEXICO CITY (AP) — The Vatican on Monday condemned the latest U.S. bombing raids on southern Iraq, just a day before a scheduled meeting between Pope John Paul II and President Bill Clinton.

In a statement issued by spokesman Joaquin Navarro-Valls and released in Mexico City, the Vatican said the military action "confirms once again" the Pope's belief that "military measures don't resolve problems in themselves, rather they aggravate them."

The Vatican has been consistent in its stand against the military actions against Iraq, and called the initial U.S.-British raids in December "aggression."

The issue is expected to be a major point of contention when Pope, who is wrapping up a five-day visit to Mexico, meets Clinton shortly after his arrival Tuesday in St. Louis, Missouri.

2 Home & Middle East News

Jordan Times, Tuesday, January 26, 1999

'Ocalan transited Russia after leaving Italy'

MOSCOW (AFP) — Rebel Turkish Kurd leader Abdullah Ocalan transited Russia after leaving Italy for an unknown destination, the leader of Moscow's Kurdish community revealed Monday.

Mahir Valar, head of the National Front for the Liberation of Kurdistan in the former Soviet bloc, told a press conference that "to leave Rome, we used a special tactic because he had to transit via one country to go to another."

"That transit country was Russia," he said.

Valar said Moscow officials were probably not aware that Ocalan had flown into Moscow from Italy since the operation was conducted in secret.

"It is not the government but the airport dispatchers

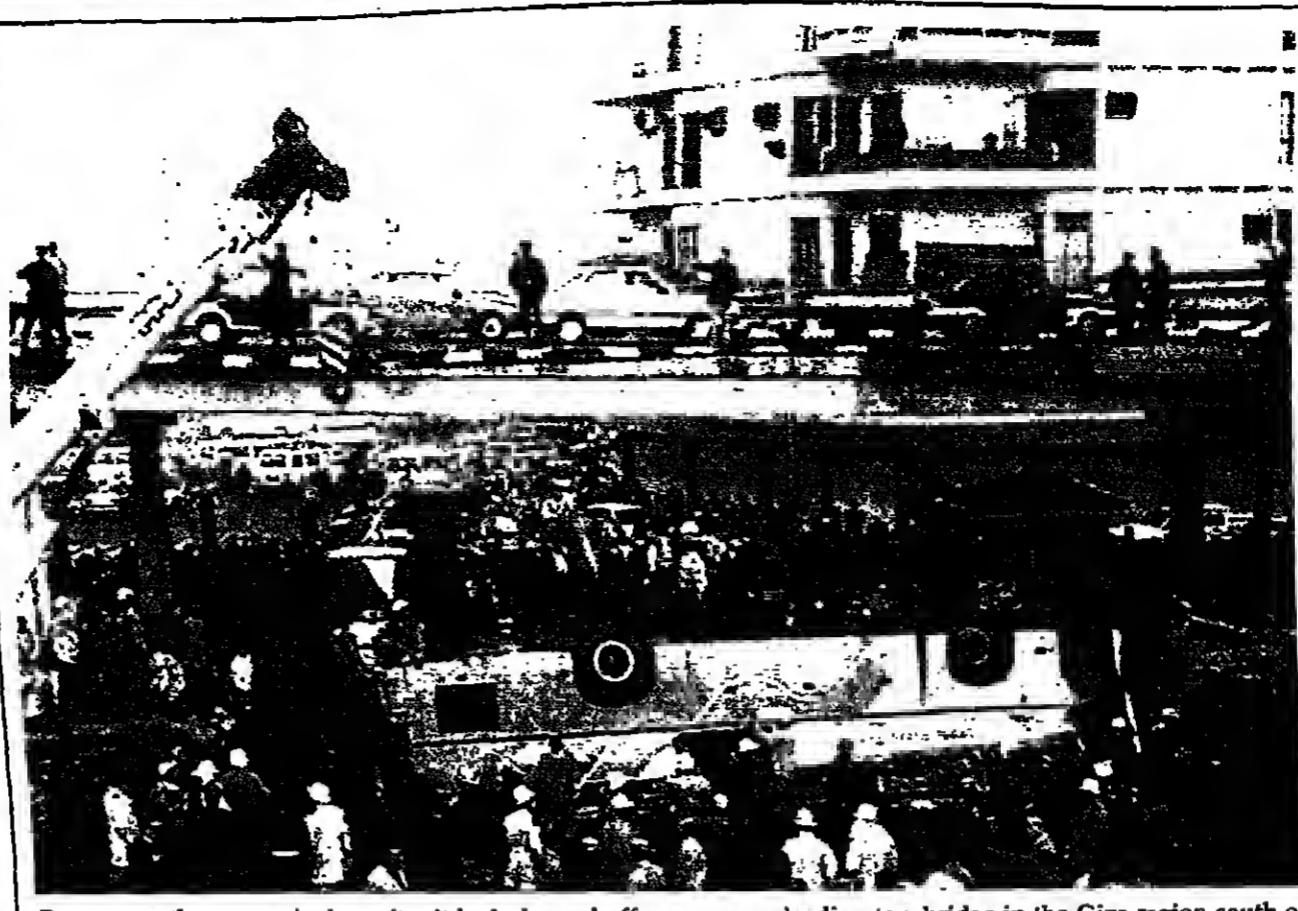
who control all the planes that cross a territory," Moscow's Kurdish leader said.

"Organising a transit through any country is not that complicated. All you need is a plane and an air corridor," he said.

In a carefully worded statement last week Russia denied that the leader of the Kurdish Labour Party (PKK) was currently on federation territory, using a form of words that did not rule out him having passed through the capital.

Moscow last autumn denied that anyone with the name Abdullah Ocalan was in Russia, but it later transpired that the rebel leader had been in hiding in the capital under an assumed name.

Ocalan arrived in Italy on Nov. 12 from Russia, where he hid after Syria expelled him under Turkish pressure in October. Since leaving Rome last Saturday, he has so far managed to keep his whereabouts unknown.



Rescuers gather around a bus after it had plunged off an overpass leading to a bridge in the Giza region south of Cairo on Monday. Twenty-two people were killed and 20 injured in the accident (AFP photo)

NEWS IN BRIEF

Britain proposes mission to Baghdad

BRUSSELS (AFP) — Britain on Monday proposed sending an EU mission to Iraq to examine possible ways of increasing the supply of humanitarian aid to the country's population, officials said. The proposal was to be outlined by Foreign Secretary Robin Cook during talks with his EU counterparts here.

Iraqi Kurdish opposition refuses U.S. aid

CAIRO (AP) — A major Iraqi Kurdish opposition group said Sunday that it will not accept U.S. support offered for efforts to oust Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein. The Kurdish Democratic Party, in a statement faxed to The Associated Press in Cairo, said it has not requested to be among the seven opposition groups U.S. President Bill Clinton has named as eligible for the \$97 million.

Israel, PNA extend Hebron mandate

JERICHO (AFP) — Israel and the Palestinians agreed on Monday to extend the mandate of the international observers who monitor and report on tensions in the divided West Bank city of Hebron. The 111-strong Temporary International Presence in Hebron (TIPH), which draws its personnel from six countries, was set up in its current form in May 1996 and started operations in January 1997 when Israel withdrew from four-fifths of Hebron.

Israeli-Palestinian hikers washed away

OCCUPIED JERUSALEM (AFP) — A group of Israeli and Palestinian political activists hiking together in the Judean desert have been washed away by a flash flood and three of them are feared dead, police said Monday. Four Israelis, a former Palestinian security prisoner and his six-year-old son were hiking in the West Bank near the Dead Sea on Sunday when they were caught by the flash flood in a dried up river bed, police said.

Israelis arrest Hamas member

NABLUS (AFP) — Israeli troops arrested a member of the Islamic Resistance Movement (Hamas) Monday during a raid on the home village of four suicide bombers who attacked Jerusalem in 1997. Palestinian sources said. Security men, accompanied by dozens of Israeli soldiers, raided four houses in the village of Asira Shamaliya, ransacking the homes, witnesses said.

Ninety-year-old Saudi takes 13-year-old

RIYADH (AFP) — A Saudi villager over the age of 90 has taken a 13-year-old for his 50th bride, a newspaper reported Monday. The man from the Jizan region in the south of the kingdom has about 50 children — the youngest is 12 and the oldest 65, the daily Al Riyadh noted.

JORDAN TELEVISION

Tel. 4773111-19

PROGRAMME TWO

16:10	French Prog. for Children
16:30	Cartoon — Bananas in Pyjamas
17:00	Doc. Life Choices
17:30	Small Talk
18:15	Omar Ben Abdul Aziz
19:00	News in French
19:15	French Prog.
19:30	News Headlines
19:35	Step by Step
20:00	Journey Across the Land of Islam
20:30	Our Mutual Friend
21:10	Doc. You and Your Car
21:30	Un Cut
22:00	News in English
22:30	Lonesome Dove
23:10	Feature Film — "Soldiers of Innocence"
00:00	End of TX.

PRAYER TIMES

05:09	Fajr
06:29	(Sunrise) Dhuhr
11:48	Dhuhr
14:43	'Asr
17:07	Maghreb
18:27	Isha

CHURCHES

St. Mary of Nazareth Church
Sweileh, Tel. 5920740
Assemblies of God Church Tel.
4632785
St. Joseph Church Tel. 4624590

JORDAN TIMES DAILY GUIDE AND CALENDAR

ment of Meteorology
Temperatures will slightly increase and skies will be partly cloudy. Winds southeasterly moderate. In Ajaba, winds southwesterly moderate, and seas calm.

Amman 03/16

Aqaba 09/23

Deserts 03/17

Jordan Valley 12/23

Yesterday's high temperatures:

Amman 13, Ajaba 21 Humidity readings: Amman 62 per cent,

Aqaba 57 per cent.

Following are the temperatures expected today in the following areas:

Ajloun 02/11

Jerash 07/17

Um Qays 05/17

Madaba 03/16

Petra 02/16

Dead Sea 11/25

USEFUL
TELEPHONE
NUMBERS
NIGHT DUTY

AMMAN: Dr. Issam Asmar 4890504

WEATHER

Bulletin supplied by the Department

Dr. Abdal Rahim Mustafa 4744685
Dr. Nidal As'ad 4751672
Dr. Mohammed Shouqir 4633693

Telephone Information (directory assistance) 121
Overseas Calls 0132

Central Amman Telephone Repairs 4623101

Abdali Tel. Repairs 5661131/7

Zarqa Govt. Hospital 09983323

Zarqa National Hospital 09900560

Ibn Sirin Hospital 09986731

Al Hilma Modern Hospital 09990990

Royal Jordanian (RJ) Flights

07:15 Sanaa (RJ)

07:30 Damascus (RJ)

09:50 Tehran, Abu Dhabi (RJ)

10:05 Vienna, Frankfurt (RJ)

12:15 Doha, Bahrain (RJ)

16:20 Cairo (RJ)

17:30 London, Frankfurt (RJ)

17:30 Chicago, Shannon (RJ)

23:10 Jeddah (RJ)

24:45 Damascus (RJ)

21:00 Abu Dhabi, Dubai (RJ)

05:45 Tel Aviv (RJ)

Royal Jordanian (RJ) Flights

06:25 Amsterdam, New York (RJ)

10:50 Berlin, Brussels (RJ)

11:30 Vienna, Frankfurt (RJ)

12:10 Paris (RJ)

12:15 London (RJ)

12:30 Cairo (RJ)

13:55 Madrid (RJ)

19:35 Beirut (RJ)

20:30 Jeddah (RJ)

21:45 Damascus (RJ)

21:00 Abu Dhabi, Dubai (RJ)

05:45 Tel Aviv (RJ)

Royal Wings (RW) Flights

09:30 Aqaba (arriving at Marka Airport) (RW)

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18:45 Tel Aviv (arriving at QALIA) (RW)

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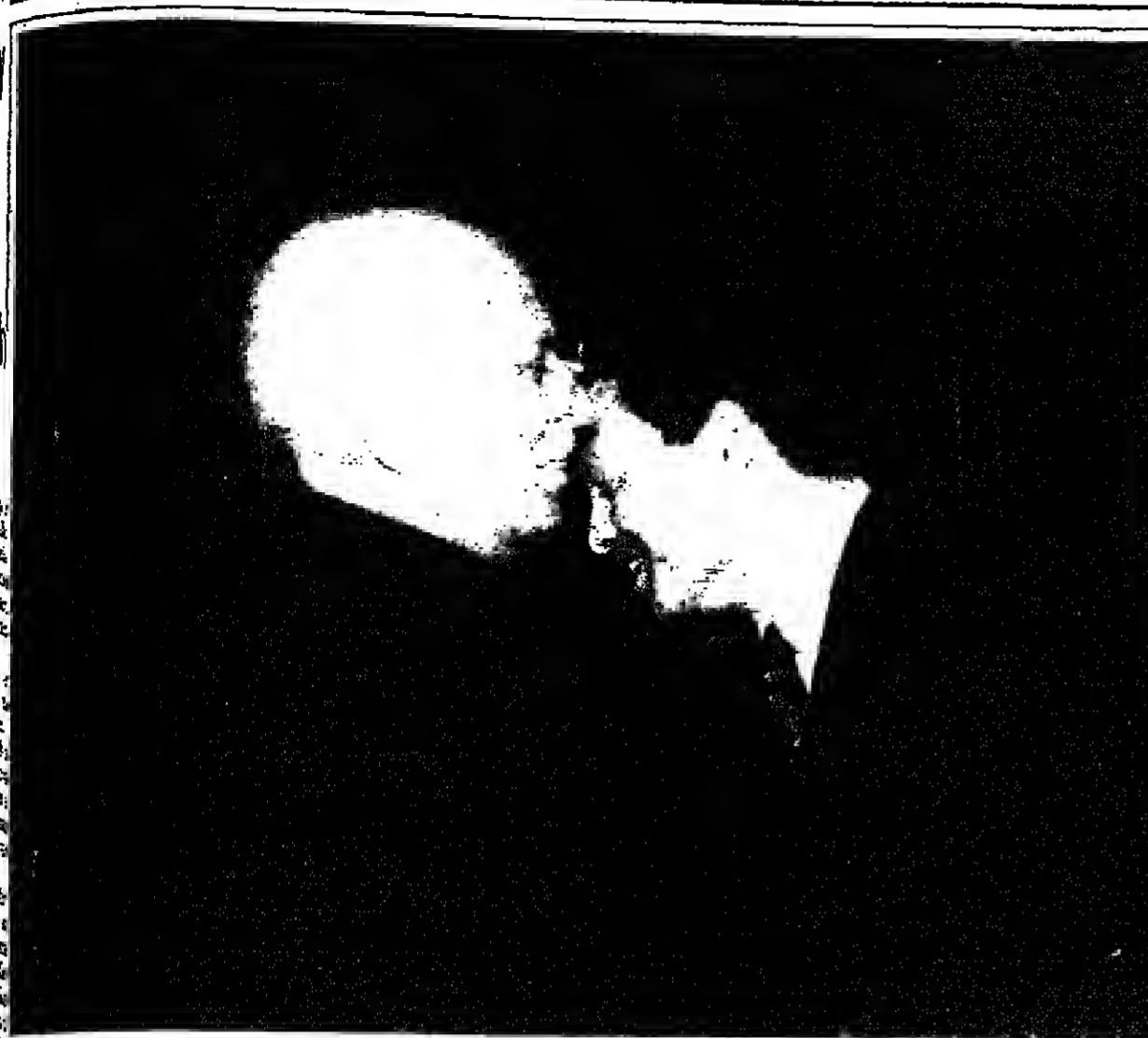
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KING GREETES CROWN PRINCE ABDULLAH: His Majesty King Hussein greets His Royal Highness Crown Prince Abdullah following his naming yesterday as the Monarch's successor (Photo by Meldos)

Agriculturalists expect drought to derail ministry's development strategy for the sector

By Mohammad Ben Hussein

"They are dreaming," said Shukri.

Jordan — Agricultural experts expect the drought hitting the country to derail a three-year agricultural development strategy aimed at boosting exports of agricultural produce, an official said Monday.

The strategy, approved by the Council of Ministers in 1997, predicted that the Kingdom's agricultural exports to traditional markets would increase by 15 percent by 2000.

However, Kheireddine Al-Khatib, the chairman of Jordan's Agricultural Exporters and Producers Association, played down the ministry's expectations and expects the agricultural sector to face serious setbacks this year due to the drought which may affect Jordan's ability to compete in international markets.

The ministry is expected to achieve different goals

during the application of the strategy which ends in 2000. Some of the programme's aspirations are to "lead the country to dependency on local products to cover market demands, grant maximum use of natural resources, especially water, increase farmers' income and improve their living conditions, steer the country's agricultural production to be in accordance with local and international market demands with good quality and competitive prices, encourage food industries and create harmony between agricultural production and agricultural marketing in the Arab and European."

The study also expected Jordan's livestock production to be 200,000 tonnes of milk, 17,000 tonnes of red meat, 110,000 tonnes of white meat, and 180,000 tonnes of grain

and animal feed.

According to a preliminary study from the agriculture ministry's Drought Committee, however, drought losses are estimated to be around JD137 million.

Earlier this month officials said they were considering making an appeal for international aid to help the country cope with the unexpected loss in revenue and capital, which will be the severest blow the country has faced in years.

In order to achieve this end, the ministry has acted to ensure the strategy's success, by encouraging the establishment of agricultural marketing companies, modernising the Kingdom's transport fleet, and removing all obstacles that delay the export of agricultural air cargo.

Iraq says at least 11 dead, dozens injured in 'savage' U.S. air raids

Continued from page 1

The U.S. Central Command said four U.S. warplanes fired laser-guided bombs at two missile sites in the southern no-fly zone after four Iraqi jets flew "south of the 33rd parallel" and ground fire from anti-aircraft artillery.

A Pentagon official said another attack occurred in the northern no-fly zone where two U.S. fighters dropped laser-guided bombs on an anti-aircraft gun that opened fire.

A further U.S. jet was illuminated by radar from an Iraqi surface-to-air missile battery in the northern zone and fired a high speed anti-radiation missile (HARM) at the site.

All U.S. aircraft returned safely to their bases, U.S. officials said.

Saudi Arabia denied Iraq charges that Western warplanes used its territory as a launch pad for Monday's attacks.

"It's possible that we did fire a missile that didn't perform as expected," General Anthony Zinni said, but before I would say more I want to make sure we investigate it thoroughly. We need more information."

Zinni laid the blame for civilian casualties on President Saddam Hussein, who he said had lied about his surface-to-air missile batteries in southern Iraq in a bid to shoot down U.S. warplanes.

Civilian casualties, obviously regretted by us, are a cause of actions initiated by Saddam Hussein," Zinni said at a Pentagon briefing.

The attacks were the direct result of the Arab foreign ministers' meeting in Cairo on Sunday. Their meeting's final statement was "green light to the Americans and British to attack."

The resolution, which was toned down amid Iraqi protests, called for Bagdad "to take the necessary steps to prove its good intentions towards Kuwait and neighbouring countries by words and deeds."

Iraqi Foreign Minister Mohammad Said Al-Sabah stressed that the resolution was "aimed at covering up new U.S. and British attacks on Iraq."

Aziz said the attacks followed the "shameful statement adopted by Saudi Arabia and Kuwait and those who collaborate with them during an Arab League meeting held in Cairo and which was welcomed immediately by Washington because it suits its policy."

"Those who allow America and Britain to use their territory and space to kill Iraqis and pay for the aggression do not represent the Arab Nation but they serve their masters in Washington and London," he added.

Iraq's official press on Monday also accused the Arab foreign ministers of providing a cover for more U.S. and British attacks.

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Jordan-Iraq trade protocol to be lowered in accordance with drop in world oil prices

By Tareq Ayyoub

AMMAN — Jordan's \$255 million trade protocol with Iraq will be lowered this year in accordance with the decline in world oil prices, Trade and Industry Minister Mohammed Saleh Hourani said Monday.

Hourani, who is expected to leave for Baghdad next week to meet with his Iraqi counterpart Mohammed Nabi Saleh, declined to give exact figures of the new protocol.

But Al Aswaaq daily quoted government officials, which the daily did

not name, as saying the new protocol is expected to range between \$160 to \$170 million.

Oil prices registered a substantial decline in the past few months following a sharp increase of oil supply in world markets. "Our oil bill with Iraq is expected to decrease following the decline in oil prices. We will discuss with Iraqi officials the new rates for the oil they export to Jordan," Hourani told the Jordan Times.

Earlier this month, Jordan and Iraq signed an agreement under which

Baghdad will supply Amman with 4.8 million tonnes of oil and petroleum by-products at concessionary rates in return for food and medicine.

The deal is exempt from U.N. sanctions against Baghdad, applied for Iraq's August 1990 invasion of Kuwait.

The protocol, which is renewed every year, stipulates that Iraq supplies Jordan with oil at preferential prices.

During his four-day visit to Baghdad, Hourani will meet Iraqi Oil Minister Amer Rasheed to discuss oil supply and the

prices Iraq intends to fix for its exports to the Kingdom.

Hourani said he will also discuss joint ventures with Iraq, especially a project to produce glucose, a project jointly financed by the two sides, and the performance of existing projects.

Hourani said, he will be accompanied by officials from the Central Bank of Jordan and the Ministry of Finance.

Following the 1990-91 Gulf War, Iraq has exported 75,000 barrels of oil and 300 tonnes of gas every day to Jordan.

Jordan seeks release of five men held in Egypt for 'anti-Egypt' activities

By Tareq Ayyoub

AMMAN — Minister of Interior Nayef Qadi said the government is seeking the release of five Jordanian prisoners jailed in Cairo following confirmed reports that they are being held there.

Qadi, who was speaking to the Lower House of Parliament late Sunday, said the government received a letter from Egyptian authorities who said they were ready to release the five men on the condition that they refrain from any anti-Egypt activities.

The minister was responding to a statement by Deputy Abdul Karim Al-Dughmi who demanded that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs seek a clarification of the reasons for the delay in the release of the five.

The lawmaker pointed out that the letter, received from Egyptian authorities on October 12, said that the five men were being held for "security reasons."

The five, who now are held in Tourah prison,

were identified as Abdul Kareem Younis, Salem Manasser, Mite'ib Oweinat, Basri Abarah and Mohammed Al Adam.

"Egyptian authorities have notified [the Jordanian government] that they are ready to release the

"described them as Palestinians."

"We have tried several times in the past to have them released, but without any result because the Egyptian authorities denied that they were Jordanian nationals," the minister told lawmakers.

The lawmaker said the Jordanian ambassador notified the interior ministry that he was awaiting a reply from the government, "but until this moment no answer has been sent to the Jordanian embassy in Cairo concerning this."

Qadi, a former ambassador to Egypt, said that Egyptian authorities had earlier denied that the men were Jordanian and

Man kills woman, commits suicide in crime of passion

By Rana Hussein

AMMAN — A 34-year-old man Monday killed himself after shooting and critically injuring his neighbour for refusing to marry him, official sources said.

The woman, FM., 34, a widow and a mother of two, was pronounced clinically dead after arriving at the hospital, while the man, identified only as A.D. died instantly according to coroners at the crime scene.

Based on preliminary investigations and questioning of the victims' relatives, the source told the Jordan Times that the police have found that the man insisted on marrying his neighbour, but she refused and he decided to kill her and himself as a result.

He added that on Monday morning, the man went for a

ride in his car, and waited for his neighbour until she returned home after giving her two children a ride to the kindergarten.

He followed her to the building's parking lot, started arguing with her, and then drew his gun and shot her once in the head before taking his own life," the source said.

Head of the National Institute of Forensic Medicine Mo'men Hadidi told the Jordan Times the autopsy on the man revealed a bullet injury on the right side of his head.

He added that the possibility of the woman surviving is minimal because she is "clinically dead and suffering from severe brain damage."

Police confirmed the incident and said they were still questioning the relatives of the victims.

Man admits killing wife to 'cleanse family honour'

By Rana Hussein

AMMAN — A 41-year-old man confessed Monday of killing his Iraqi wife on grounds that he wanted to "cleanse his family's honour," official sources said.

Initial reports had indicated that the victim's 11-year-old son confessed to the shooting incident, claiming that he was playing with his father's gun when a bullet was accidentally fired and struck his mother.

But on Monday, official sources said the father "collapsed" in front of prosecutors and confessed to the murder "on the grounds that his wife, and the mother of his six children was acting immorally."

"The father told investigators that he encouraged his son to lie and claim that he accidentally shot his mother so that he could escape punishment," the source said.

Under Jordanian law, minors are not sent to prisons for crimes committed. Instead they are sentenced to a certain period of time at a juvenile correction centre depending on the nature of the crime committed.

The sentence for adults convicted of premeditated murder

committed to avenge 'immoral behaviour' ranges from three months to 15 years in prison, depending on the circumstances of the case.

The victim, Manal Jalal, was reportedly shot once in the head at around 2:00 a.m. while sleeping. Her 11-year-old son confessed to the shooting incident, claiming that he was playing with a bullet when a bullet was accidentally fired and struck his mother.

According to the source, the man said he killed his wife after 17 years of marriage, following an argument about her alleged immoral behaviour. He added that his wife's behaviour has changed recently, and that she was missing for four days last week.

Later, the husband contradicted the son's initial confession, saying that "he found his wife in a hotel and brought her home where they had an argument. He then drew a gun and shot her because her statements provoked him," the source said. Criminal Prosecutor Tawfiq Qasim, who is handling the case, has officially charged the man with premeditated murder.

What's Going On

FILM

• "Scent of Women" at Books@Cafe, Jabal Amman at 8:30 p.m. (Tel. 4650-457).

EXHIBITIONS

• "The Warm Winter" — works by several artists at Orfali Art Gallery, Um Uthaina (Tel. 5526932), until Feb. 1.

• The Tenth Anniversary Exhibition of Contemporary Arab Artists at Darat Al Funun, Jabal Weibdeh (Tel. 4632512), until Jan. 28.

News In Brief

Arab Games looks for support

AMMAN (Petra) — Arab League Secretary General Esmael Abdul Meguid Tuesday said the Arab League has sent messages to Arab countries urging them to provide financial and moral support to the 9th Pan-Arab Games, to be held here in mid-August. In a message to Minister of Youth Talal Suleiman Al-Hussein, Abdul Meguid thanked Jordan for inviting him to the opening of the games and promised to attend the opening.

Aqaba celebrates King's return

AQABA (Petra) — Aqaba Governorate Tuesday celebrated His Majesty King Hussein's recovery and safe return home. Aqaba Governor Abdul Karim Al-Malahmeh led a march which kicked off on Tuesday morning. Citizens carried banners and placards carrying congratulatory messages to King Hussein. Hundreds of cars, decked with flowers and pictures of King Hussein also toured Aqaba streets.

Jordan to attend art festival

AMMAN (Petra) — Jordan will take part in the Muscat International Festival of Art and Handicrafts, which will be held in the Omani capital from 9 February-27 January. The Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities Secretary General Ali Halough Bouran will lead a Jordanian delegation, comprising representatives of the Jordan Tourism Board and representatives of the traditional handicraft industry. Bouran will meet senior Omani officials and discuss scopes of bilateral cooperation.

Albright holds Russia talks, PM to meet Gore

MOSCOW (R) — U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright and Russian Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov met Monday to try to narrow differences on a range of disputes burdening relations between Moscow and Washington.

Ivanov greeted Albright in swirling snow outside the Russian Foreign Ministry in central Moscow and they went inside for a first round of talks without speaking to reporters.

Later, Ivanov told journalists the aim was to bring their positions closer on various topics of world importance.

"They were held in a constructive and businesslike atmosphere," he said of his initial talks with Albright. There was no immediate word from the U.S. delegation on the talks.

Speaking to reporters en route to Moscow, Albright acknowledged differences had accumulated since her last visit in September but denied ties were in crisis or that the United States should respond by trying to contain Russian influence.

"I do not see this as some kind of critical point in our relations, given that we have as much contact as we do, all of which is mostly in a problem solving mode," she said.

"Containment would be a totally counter-productive move. The whole point is to engage Russia... A lot of

different things are going on and we need to work on the positive."

Apparently as part of this process, Prime Minister Yevgeny Primakov will meet U.S. Vice President Al Gore Friday in the Swiss resort of Davos, the premier's spokeswoman told Reuters.

Primakov is scheduled to meet Albright later Monday.

A telephone conversation between President Boris Yeltsin, who is in hospital with a stomach ulcer, and Albright has not yet been scheduled, a U.S. spokesman told reporters.

But he added: "We still expect it to happen."

Russia opposes U.S. military action over the Iraq and Kosovo crises and rejects U.S. accusations it has leaked sensitive missile technology to Iran. There was no immediate word from Moscow on Monday's U.S. air strikes in southern Iraq.

The United States has taken a firm line on the need for economic reform in Russia and has antagonised Moscow by announcing plans to develop a nuclear missile defence system which threatens the 1972 Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty.

"It was quite cordial but I think there was very little ground given on either side," the spokesman said.

After Russia, Albright flies to Egypt, then Saudi Arabia, Britain and France, returning to Washington Friday.



Russian Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov bugs U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright in front of the Foreign Ministry building. Albright arrived in Moscow Monday saying she was seeking positive dialogue rather than confrontation on a backlog of disputes between Moscow and Washington (Reuters photo)

Malaysia's new foreign minister takes office

KUALA LUMPUR (AFP) — Malaysia's new foreign minister Syed Hamid Albar took office Monday, pledging to continue cooperation while maintaining harmonious ties with other countries, the official Bernama news agency reported.

"As foreign minister, I will play an active role towards achieving the objectives of Malaysia's foreign policy," he was quoted as saying.

The former defence minister succeeds Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, who is now deputy prime minister and home affairs minister following a cabinet reshuffle on Jan. 8. Syed Hamid said he was keen to resolve all its outstanding disputes with Singapore, the country's

closest neighbour.

"The relationship between our two countries is so intertwined... There are some sensitivities that we have to look at and we try to avoid areas that can create differences," he said.

"Let us look at things where we can find common ground and let us move forward. That has always been our viewpoint," he said. "I think both our leaders want to achieve a win-win situation for the two countries."

An old dispute over a Malaysian railway station in Singapore flared again last week after Singapore Foreign Minister S. Jayakumar said Kuala Lumpur had a month to present legal arguments on why it should remain at its

present station.

Bui Syed Hamid last week ruled out piecemeal negotiations with Singapore, saying the railway station issue should be settled as a package with other issues as agreed on last month by both countries.

Other issues include Malaysia's water supply to Singapore, pension funds held by Malaysian workers in Singapore, the fate of Malaysian company shares formerly traded in Singapore and alleged violations of Malaysian airspace by the Singapore air force.

Ties between the two countries have been stormy since Singapore broke away from the Malaysian federation in 1965.

Cambodian opposition leader speaks out on Taiwanese toxic waste

SIHANOUKVILLE, Cambodia (AP) — Opposition leader Sam Rainsy called on top government officials Monday to resign over a scandal involving the dumping of 3,000 tonnes of Taiwanese toxic waste in Cambodia.

The firebrand politician claimed he has obtained evidence that implicates high-level officials in Prime Minister Hun Sen's government, but said he would not point fingers until he could prove who collected an alleged \$3 million bribe to allow the waste to enter Cambodia.

"We will show that the \$3 million was collected by the top people, the ministers, and these people should resign," Sam Rainsy said as he toured the waste site on the outskirts of this seaport town, 185 kilometres southeast of Phnom Penh.

The waste, which contains dangerous levels of the poisonous metal mercury, was discovered in a crude dump last month by environmental officials after being sent to

Cambodia by the major Taiwanese petrochemical company Formosa Plastics Corp.

A dockworker died after cleaning the hold of the ship that transported the waste, spurring a panicked exodus from Sihanoukville that killed four people in traffic accidents.

A sixth death — a villager who rummaged through the waste and used the sacks it came in for a makeshift bed — has also been linked to the dumping.

More than 100 government officials — mostly Sihanoukville customs officials — have been suspended in the scandal and a prosecutor told a local newspaper last week that at least nine will be criminally charged.

Sam Rainsy claimed that only high-level officials could have approved the shipment, pointing to a statement last month by National Assembly President Prince Norodom Ranariddh that a \$3 million bribe had been paid to accept the waste.

The prince said he was told of the bribe by Hun Sen.

"We have to identify who is responsible," Sam Rainsy said.

"I don't think the low-ranking customs officers... got the \$3 million." The opposition leader also called on Formosa Plastics to take back the waste by Feb. 30 — 90 days from its arrival — and to pay all costs associated with the dumping, both immediate and long-term.

The government has made similar demands and is negotiating a settlement deal with the company.

Formosa Plastics has already agreed to take back the waste, now packed into oil drums and freight containers, but environmentalists fear the company will stall as long as it can.

Sam Rainsy called for the passage of legislation to ban the import of hazardous material to Cambodia.

Environment Minister Mok Mareth has called the Formosa shipment illegal, but legal experts say Cambodia's environment law has several loopholes that could allow the waste's import.

Controversial military court orders another hanging in Pakistan

KARACHI, Pakistan (AP) — Pakistan's controversial anti-terrorist military courts sentenced three men to death Monday for the killing last year of a former Sindhi provincial legislator, an army spokesman said.

However it's not clear when the sentence will be carried out because Pakistan's Supreme Court has ordered all executions imposed by these military courts suspended until it

decides whether they are legal.

That hearing is scheduled to begin on Feb. 1 in the federal capital of Islamabad.

While the Supreme Court has suspended executions it has not barred the military courts from hearing cases.

Since the courts were established by Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif in November last year, 13 people have been sentenced to death. Of those, two have

already been hanged and one was acquitted — a 13-year-old boy.

The courts were set up in southern Sindh province after Sharif dismissed the provincial government and launched a crackdown aimed at ending the relentless violence wracking the provincial capital of Karachi.

Human rights groups have protested the establishment of these courts calling them unconstitutional. Sharif how-

ever says he wants to establish them throughout the country.

The courts were set up to mete out quick justice. The latest trial began on Jan. 11 and concluded just 14 days later. Cases being heard before civil courts can take months to go to trial.

Many of the people sentenced have been members of the ethnic party the Muttahida Qami Movement, which claims to represent

Indian Muslims who migrated to Pakistan following independence of the subcontinent in 1947.

The MQM, which is the politically dominant party in Karachi, is seeking recognition as a fifth ethnic group in Pakistan, something successive governments have rejected.

The MQM accuses the government of using the military courts to arrest its members and destroy the political

power of the party.

"These courts are controversial... we don't consider them just so it is irrelevant what punishment they give," said Nasreen Jaleel, a spokeswoman for the MQM's largest faction run by exiled leader Altaf Hussein.

"It is selective justice," she said. "The government is using the armed forces for its own political purposes. The military courts will make the armed forces unpopular."

Pirates rampage in Asia seas, whole crews missing

HONG KONG (R) — Ship hijackings in Asian waters have become more frequent and more violent, and entire crews may have been killed in some cases, industry officials and sources said Monday.

Appealing to governments in the region to give priority to the problem, they said violence at sea would spin out of control unless action was taken.

"Violence has been increasing. We have seen a lot of ships in this region, in the South China Sea and Indonesia, hijacked lately," said Noel Choong, regional manager at the International Maritime Bureau's piracy reporting centre in Kuala

Lumpur.

"And this time, we find whole ships are missing with the entire crew, and they (crimes) are of a very gruesome nature," he told Reuters.

Recent hijackings of two ships, involving 38 crewmen, have sparked renewed concern.

The Panama-registered Tenu, owned by Kobe-based Masumoto Kisen Shipping Co., went missing in late September in the Straits of Malacca while bound for South Korea with aluminium ingots.

It later turned up at a port in eastern China with a different name and crew. Its original crew — two

South Koreans and 13 Chinese — are feared dead, industry sources said.

The ship and its 16-member Indonesian crew were being detained in Zhanjiang port in China's Jiangsu province pending investigation, sources said.

Another case involved the mineral ore-laden bulk carrier Cheung Son, also Panama-registered, which disappeared in the Taiwan Strait in late December while sailing for China.

Hong Kong newspapers said three of the Cheung Son's 23 crew were recently identified among six bodies found in fishing nets off southern China.

Chinese authorities have arrested seven men in connection with the case.

"The fate of the remaining (Cheung Son) crew is unknown. Of course, chances of them being alive are very slim," a well-placed industry source said. Cheung Son's Hong Kong-based owner Waibert Steamship Co Ltd has declined comment.

Choong said the two cases were different from past hijackings when pirates freed the ship and crew after taking valuables and destroying communication equipment.

The violence started towards the end of 1998, he said.

"Towards the end of

1998, we've been seeing a lot of hijacked ships where we have (whole) crews missing and I believe, killed. It's a major concern for us," Choong said.

Figures of violent piracy cases in 1998 are to be released by the International Maritime Bureau in early February.

The two cases also have sparked renewed pleas for help.

"We call for strong government action to wipe out piracy in Asian waters... before it gets out of control," Choong said.

The incidents have caused alarm among Hong Kong shipowners, with some saying they

would raise their concerns with authorities in Hong Kong and Beijing.

"Of course we are very concerned about all these recent incidents at sea," M.H. Liang, chairman of Island Navigation Corp International Ltd, said recently.

"In one case, I have even brought it up with the Hong Kong and Macau Affairs Office," said Liang, who also is chairman of the Hong Kong Shipowners Association.

The office Liang cited is under China's State Council, which deals with Hong Kong and Macau matters.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Nepali King holds talks with Indian leaders

NEW DELHI (R) — Nepal's King Birendra held talks Monday with Indian leaders aimed at further strengthening ties between the two neighbours, officials said. King Birendra and Queen Ashwari arrived in New Delhi Sunday as chief guests of India's Republic Day celebrations to be held Tuesday. "A new chapter will start in Indo-Nepal relations," Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpeyi told reporters after talks with the 53-year-old monarch, who is on his first official visit to India since 1993. Vajpeyi said the king's visit was of great significance and would further strengthen the friendly relations between the two countries. King Birendra, thanking the Indian government for the opportunity, hoped bilateral relations would get a boost. Nepal and India share a 1,500-km border which is open for free movement of their citizens under a 48-year-old treaty. India is Nepal's major economic partner and the two countries share close cultural and business ties. The two sides will discuss ways to boost bilateral trade and forge closer ties that will take them into the next millennium. Indian officials said ahead of the visit.

Polish farmers block roads, borders to protest imports

WARSAW (AFP) — Polish farmers blocked some 20 roads and border crossing points Monday to protest cheap European imports which they say are driving them out of business, officials said. The militants blocked two frontier posts with Germany and the Czech Republic, as well as the main Poznan-Warsaw highway, used by transcontinental trucks cross en route for Moscow, said police spokesman Pawel Biedzki. Last week, the head of the Samoobrona union Andrzej Lepper warned that militants would "paralyse the country" this week if their demands for bans on foreign imports are not met. Premier Jerzy Buzek said the action was "political" and insisted the government was trying to help farmers. Monday the protesters used farm vehicles and piles of tyres to stop traffic, although most of the action was on non-trunk roads, said the spokesman, adding that police were organising diversions. They blocked the Jedrzychowice crossing on the Czech border. The farmers say they are suffering from huge imports of western agricultural products which they claim are "subsidised" by the European Union. They want the imports either stopped or taxed. In addition to aid from Brussels, the more modern western agricultural production benefits from relatively low manufacturing costs. Friday, more than a thousand farmers, some armed with pitchforks and scythes, used tractors, harrows, manure tanks, piles of tyres and barbed wire to block a large customs terminal in Swiecko, on the Polish-German border. They ended that action Saturday, even though talks between Lepper and Polish Agriculture Minister Jacek Janiszewski, who had travelled to Swiecko to meet the farmers, broke off after only a brief encounter.

Sri Lanka Buddhists mark temple bombing with protests

COLOMBO (R) — Buddhist monks took to the streets Monday in Kandy demanding that the anniversary of a blast at the central Sri Lanka town's famed Temple of Tooth be declared a day of national mourning. "We gathered at the temple to express the anger and opposition of the Sinhala Buddhists over the bombing and destruction of the temple by Tiger terrorists," a member of the clergy told Reuters by phone from Kandy. An alms giving ceremony was held at the temple for the clergy and poor in memory of 16 people killed in the blast exactly a year ago on Jan. 25, 1998, officials at the temple said. "It is the government's duty to declare today (Monday) as a national day of mourning because it is a great day of sadness for Buddhists," said the priest, who declined to be identified. Some 69.3 per cent of Sri Lanka's 18.5 million people are Buddhist. The Dalada Maligawa, Sri Lanka's most revered shrine that houses Lord Buddha's tooth relics, was severely damaged in the bomb blast, which the government blamed on the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) rebels. The LTTE rebels have been fighting government troops for a separate homeland for minority Tamils in Sri Lanka's since 1983. The temple was to have been the venue for Sri Lanka's 50th independent anniversary celebrations on Feb. 4 last year with Britain's Prince Charles as the chief guest, but the event was shifted to Colombo after the attack. Reconstruction work at the temple is still continuing and likely to finish only by the middle of this year.

New case of mad cow disease uncovered

PARIS (AP) — The fourth case this year of bovine spongiform encephalopathy — known as mad cow disease — was discovered in northwestern France, the Agriculture Ministry said Monday. The milk cow, born in July 1994 in La Manche, was from a herd of 71 cows in the La Manche region near the English Channel. All 71 cows in the herd were slaughtered and incinerated late last week, the ministry said. It was the fourth case of mad cow disease discovered this year and the 53rd case since 1991, the ministry said. Mad cow disease was first detected in 1985. It causes holes in the brain, making cattle staggering and drooling. There is no known cure. Scientists believe mad cow disease may be linked to an equally fatal human brain ailment, Creutzfeldt-Jakob Disease.

Miracle survival of Senegalese stowaway in plane's landing gear

LYON (AFP) — The survival of a young Senegalese stowaway who hid for some five hours in the landing gear of an Airbus bound from Dakar to Lyon is almost a miracle, French doctors say. The stowaway, first believed to be 19 or 20 but who claims to have been born in 1984, was found unconscious "in bad shape but alive" after the Jan. 17 landing of the Air Afrique Airbus A-300. After eight days in hospital, doctors Sunday said he was out of danger while expressing surprise he had survived the rare ordeal of extreme cold and lack of oxygen. "To survive at 9,000 or 10,000 metres is normally impossible under the laws of physics," said Bernard Marsini, an anaesthetist. "A human being only has a 20 per cent breathing capacity at 9,000 metres," said Hugues Chardonnat, a specialist in hypoxia, the condition resulting from a lack of oxygen supply to the body. Ironically, Chardonnat speculated that the young man may have been saved by hypothermia which "would have protected his brain that no longer needed oxygen. This is often the case with avalanche victims who can be revived after several hours if their body temperature is not too low." French officials said the reasons for his desperate bid to leave the country remained a mystery. He has been placed in hospital care pending his repatriation to Senegal. Should he prove to be a minor, he will be handed over to a children's court for a ruling.

Families of 2 Marines protest imposed anthrax vaccinations

ELTON, New York (AP) — The families of two Marines are protesting the government's plans to vaccinate 2.4 million military personnel against anthrax, saying it could lead to long-term health problems for their sons.

The parents of Adam Cooper and Bradley Watson, friends who grew up together in this upscale New York town, say the military does not know enough about the vaccination and its side effects to require shots for all its personnel.

So far, about 166,000 people have received at least the first in a series of six vaccinations against the potentially fatal disease, according to Jim Turner, a spokesman for the Department of Defence.

Turner says the vaccine has been around for the last 25 to 30 years and is safe. "It's been thoroughly tested. It's (government)-approved," he told the Utica Observer-Dispatch in Monday's edition.

But the Coopers and Watsons believe the vaccine may not be entirely safe. Both families told the Observer-Dispatch they have spent many hours researching the effects of the vaccine and believe it may be related to what is popularly known as Gulf war syndrome, or the variety of illnesses suffered by veterans after the Gulf war.

The families have contacted U.S. Rep. Sherwood Boehlert's office to protest the vaccination program and are scheduling a town meeting here next month to hear from former military personnel who have taken the vaccine and some who resigned to avoid it.

"I'm no revolutionary. I'm doing this because my son's life is at stake," Tim Watson said. "It's morally wrong. They are using our children as guinea pigs. We are not at war."

This is something that could be delayed until further tests are done." Because of the threat of anthrax being used as "germ warfare," the military announced in 1997 that it would vaccinate all of its active and reserve personnel by 2005.

Watson is concerned the anthrax vaccine given to soldiers in the Gulf may have led to the problems many have reported experiencing in recent years, including lumps, fatigue, headaches, dizziness, cancer, infertility and birth defects.

There are no hard facts to substantiate any medical problems being linked to the anthrax vaccine or any other vaccine soldiers were given in the Gulf.



Director Steven Spielberg displays the two Golden Globe Awards as he heads to a post-show party sponsored by his studio DreamWorks after the 56th Annual Golden Globe Awards in Beverly Hills. Spielberg won as Best Director and as producer for Best Drama Motion Picture for his epic World War II film "Saving Private Ryan". (Reuters photo)

Missionary killers deserve no mercy, says India PM

BUBANESWAR, India (R) — Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee said Monday that no mercy should be shown to the murderers of a Christian missionary and his sons, who were burned to death by a mob of right-wing Hindu extremists.

Graham Staines, 58, and his sons Philip, 10, and Timothy, eight, were killed in the eastern Indian state of Orissa Saturday when the vehicle in which they were sleeping was set alight.

"No mercy should be shown to the perpetrators of

this inhuman crime. The (state) chief minister has been told that the state government should take stern action. Some arrests have been made. Some others are likely," Vajpayee's spokesman quoted him as saying.

In Baripada, where Staines had worked among poor tribals and lepers for 30 years, some 10,000 people gathered for the victims' funeral procession. Daily life came to a halt in the town as a mark of respect, with shops closing for half a day.

State police launched a massive manhunt for Dara Singh, a leader of the Bajrang Dal Hindu nationalist group who they believe masterminded the lynching.

Bajrang Dal, an ally of the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), has been accused of instigating a spate of recent attacks on Christians in the western state of Gujarat. The Hindu group has denied involvement.

Police suspected that Singh may have fled to the neighbouring state of Madhya Pradesh or Uttar

Pradesh to the west. Australian Foreign Minister Alexander Downer expressed concern and grief at the incident.

Mr. Staines devoted his life to serving others and it is unconscionable that he and his sons should have been killed in this horrific way," Downer said in a statement.

"The government expects that those responsible for the deaths of Mr. Staines and his sons will be brought to justice promptly in accordance with India's constitutional and judicial processes."

He said Australia had voiced its concerns over the brutal incident to the Indian government and hoped other Australians working in similar situations would be afforded protection.

Indian police have so far arrested 47 people and announced a reward of 25,000 rupees (\$600) for Dara Singh.

The chief of a powerful regional ally in India's BJP-led ruling coalition, Jayaram Jayalalitha, called for "ruthless action against these new terrorists."

were seen emerging from booths, changing their shirts and rubbing the ink marks off their fingers that had been put on by election officials. Then they voted again.

Some of them repeated the process several times.

Witnesses said a large crowd attacked polling stations near Kurunegala, 95 kilometres northeast of Colombo and chased away the voters. Similar incidents were reported from other voting centres also.

Election Commission officials said the supervising body will review allegations of vote rigging and could order another vote at some polling stations.

Before the election, the watchdog group said it had received complaints of nearly 800 election-related violence since last month.

"In the last 48 hours, a total of 117 incidents of election-related violence have been reported." The group said two people were killed and nine escaped assassination attempts during pre-election campaign that started last month.

'Sri Lanka's provincial poll rigged'

COLOMBO, Sri Lanka (AP) — An independent watchdog group accused the president's supporters of vote fraud and intimidation during a crucial provincial election Monday.

The vote in the Northwestern Provincial Council is being seen as a test of President Chandrika Kumaratunga's popularity. A victory may prompt her to order general elections in the island nation 17 months ahead of schedule. Sri Lanka has eight provinces.

The Centre for Monitoring Election Violence said it received reports from its monitors and opposition activists of an "organized campaign of election violence and electoral malpractice" by Kumaratunga's People's Alliance party.

The Centre comprises human rights groups and media personalities. There was no immediate government reaction to the charge.

"This was not a free and fair poll," said opposition leader Ranil

Wickramasinghe shortly after the polling booths closed.

He charged the ruling party "has strangled democracy."

Nearly 1.3 million people were registered to elect a 52-member council from among 446 candidates from seven political parties, including Kumaratunga's party and the main opposition United National Party. There was no immediate report on the turnout. Results were expected later Monday or early Tuesday.

Three polling booths closed after 90 minutes of voting supporters of the People's Alliance, backed by gunmen carrying assault rifles, stuffed the ballot boxes, the centre said.

The presiding officer complained that the official election stamp was taken away by the intruders. "Voters of the area were unable to cast their vote," it said.

At many polling stations visited by journalists, People's Alliance activists

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An independent Arab political daily published in English by the Jordan Press Foundation Established 1975
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Editorial and Advertising offices
Jordan Press Foundation,
University Road, P.O. Box 6710, Amman

Telephones: 5684311, 5699634, 5667171, 5603585

Faxsimile: Editorial: 5696183, Advertising: 5693337

E-mail: jotimes@go.com.jo
Web Site: <http://www.accesszabaria.com/jordantimes/>

The Jordan Times is published daily except Fridays. Subscription and advertising rates are available from the Jordan Times Advertising Department

Formidable tasks

HIS MAJESTY King Hussein must have been fully aware of the anxiety and anticipation that gripped Jordanians in the past few days amid reports of an imminent change in succession. But he relied on his people's trust and confidence that he, being their leader for the past 47 years, would not fail them. He has always known that at crucial junctures he could count on their full support. And now that he has taken his decision and appointed HRH Prince Abdullah as heir to the Throne, he can be sure that his subjects will renew their allegiance to the Hashemite Throne, the symbol of the country's stability and continuity, and to the young Crown Prince.

Jordanians expect of their King and his successor to keep steering the country and nation towards a brighter and better future.

Modern Jordan, built under the constant and caring guidance of His Majesty, owes an immeasurable debt of gratitude to HRH Prince Hassan for his efforts, particularly in the areas of political and economic development and the advancement of scientific research and education. The foundations that were laid down by His Majesty King Hussein, with the help of Prince Hassan, will serve as a strong base for Prince Abdullah to contribute towards the enhancement of democracy, pluralism and economic development as envisioned by the King. As continuing processes these goals require much work. Before Jordanians, the true Arab nationalists, can genuinely feel content, the cause of democracy here, as well as everywhere in the Arab World, needs to be pursued. Our economy needs to be strengthened, and our education system must be overhauled. Last but not least, the course of Arab nationalism, at the heart of every man and woman, needs to be resurrected.

Formidable tasks indeed, but certainly not impossible. Not when the people are prepared to sacrifice for their attainment.

Placed at the heart of the Arab World, but blessed with its educated and enlightened people, Jordan, as His Majesty King Hussein has said on many occasions, should be made a model for the Arabs to emulate in terms of democracy, scientific development and culture. For that to happen, Jordanians need to embark on the political, economic and social reforms that its leadership and people have long been seeking.

ARABIC PRESS COMMENTARIES

Al Ra'i's Mahmoud Rimawi said Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's fundamental extremism makes his opponents look moderate compared to him. Among those is Yitzhak Mordechai, who left Netanyahu's right-wing Likud after some hesitation as a result of the prime minister's continuing suspicion against his colleagues and ministers, said Rimawi. Although Mordechai is generally described as a supporter of peace agreements, his support is not accompanied by a clear policy, especially when it comes to Israel's security, occupation and the settlements, and he is not well-known for his support of a Palestinian state in the West Bank or Gaza, the writer said. Mordechai, as an Iraqi Kurd, is "forced" by his oriental origins to compete with Western rightists in proving his eagerness to serve the Jewish state, he noted. However, Rimawi said, Mordechai is not as stubborn as Netanyahu, and his move to join a centrist party is, no doubt, weakening the Likud.

Al Dustour's Mazen Saket said that although phrases like the Third World and developing countries have gone after the fall of communism the Third World's problem still exist and are, in fact, expanding. With the new World Order and increased globalisation, such countries face tough obstacles and challenges with little power, Saket claimed. In the absence of a balance of power, the role of multinational institutions and banks in the Third World are setting conditions that abuse human resources, their labour as well as the fruit of their labours, said the writer. All indications show, that the Third World's capability to achieve progress and development has been limited and is conditional upon Western organisations' desires. If the Third World, including the Arabs, does not unify soon, it will face an insurmountable challenge, Saket warned.

His Majesty King Hussein's letter to His Royal Highness Prince Hassan

(Continued from page 1)

At the time my decision concerning succession to the throne was not subject to any personal or emotional considerations but rather was a national one. It was a decision stemming from my feeling of responsibility and the need to place the national interest and the country's stability and survival above all considerations and interests. My objective was to perform my duty towards my people and nation, to seek God's blessing and peace of mind, and to achieve stability and reassurance all Jordanians about the future. This requires cohesion and national unity by God's grace after going through all kinds of experiences and ordeals.

We have sought to be transparent in all our affairs and we were keen on modernisation and reforms in all matters that lead to progress and success and in an atmosphere of democracy.

It was during my first trip abroad for medical treatment when cancerous cells were discovered in my left ureter, which was removed in addition to my left kidney. The suffering I felt at the time was a reason for my deep insight into the past and the present, as I was carrying the Holy Koran when I moved from one therapy session to another. God's words served as my spiritual and mental nourishment. I had reached a point when I concluded that the long trip had exhausted me physically and I felt my agility was not like before and that there were boundaries which, if crossed, would take their toll on my resistance.

I was left with my mind and memory intact, thank God, and I was looking forward to doing whatever I could towards serving the nation and its future and the coming generations until the last breath of my life.

To achieve that, I returned home deciding to abdicate the throne in your favour despite the differences between us at times. My small family was offended by slandering and falsehoods, and I refer here to my wife and children. When I heard this most of the time, I attributed it to the tendency towards rivalry among those who pretend to be faithful to you and who attribute to you anything good in whatever you do. I have failed over the years in my advice to you and our family to stop asking the media to focus on persons instead of focusing on content and on those who we should celebrate, such as graduates and creative people.

We have overlooked all these matters because when I returned, I was accorded a great reception by my Jordanian family on that eternal day, which left an indelible impression on me. The Jordanian family has overwhelmed me with its noble feelings that strengthened my resolve and determination to do the impossible to help Jordan achieve peace, following in the footsteps of Egypt and after our Palestinian brothers assumed their responsibilities towards achieving that goal, because this is a right which they exercise with their own will. We support their cause and the Palestinian leadership with all our might.

The commencement of the peace process came at a time when Jordan was under siege and the doors were closed. It came at a time when it was believed that the country had come to a standstill. Through the peace process, we secured the restoration of occupied Jordanian territory and we found the solution for the water problem and our full share of water was returned to us. We are still searching and cooperating with all parties to secure the needs of the nation and its future generations, and we continue our efforts towards developing our agriculture and industry. We are trying to achieve peace and we are exploiting all our influence to support our Palestinian brothers, helping them regain their rights on their land and establish their own state on their national soil. We are trying to achieve the objective of all people seeking a just peace in this region. We stand strongly against any tendency towards destruction and death and

against the use of weapons of mass destruction. We demand that the whole world stand united against any party seeking destruction or backing terrorism, wherever they might be.

After a thorough examination, it is clear to me that the situation has become extremely dangerous and is a source of constant concern to the world in view of the capability and ease of developing weapons and the access to expertise to make those weapons and use them.

Perhaps biological weapons are the most dangerous of all, because they reintroduce to the world certain diseases that have already become extinct, like smallpox.

Production of vaccines against the disease has stopped, and the effects of these vaccines end after a time if not used. In addition, there are doubts revolving around the effect of any remaining quantities of the vaccine. The most dangerous aspects of this disease is that its symptoms do not appear immediately, and the carrier of the disease can easily transmit it to those with whom he has contact.

In the present time of fast communication, such disease can move with an amazing speed around the world, endangering the lives of all people without discrimination.

In addition, the world is witnessing material greed which can cause great damage to the earth's environment unless sound measures are taken. It has to be pointed out that cancer is an outcome of that situation. For example, skin cancer has been proven to be a result of holes in the ozone layer. No doubt other forms of cancer result from environmental pollution in the atmosphere, in addition to smoking.

What is more dangerous is that such an atmosphere leads towards drastic changes in the world, like changes in the climate and rainfall. Such an atmosphere also can cause devastating floods and behind fires that destroy tropical forests and pollute the waters of rivers, lakes and seas.

Returning to the peace process, I appreciate what you have done to make it succeed, and I should admit it was not an easy job. You have helped me in selecting competitive Jordanians who are loyal to their country and capable of working and defending its rights under all conditions. For that I am grateful and I appreciate what you have done.

Some people may question the reason behind keeping certain officials in their positions. My answer is they are the elite of this nation and they have risen to the occasion with the courage and true affiliation to the country and great affection towards serving their homeland, whether civilian or military personalities, technicians or experts.

After my first trip abroad for treatment we entered the peace process and we exerted all efforts towards making it a success. We embarked on this mission armed with our strong belief in God, our belief that we are all the descendants of Abraham and our belief in the futility of wars and tragedies that befall people.

We were oriented towards construction and doing good, and we have always sought to persuade the world that peace cannot be achieved without justice and that the world should deal with the Arabs on an equal footing so that the inhabitants of this region can protect their interests. We have called on the world to start a serious and objective dialogue in order to lay down the new principles for actual cooperation, free of selfishness and free of the desire to place petty interests above major ones. We welcome any one who is committed to contributing to a law governing bilateral or collective dealings among the people of the world to join us. Those who go astray must be held accountable for their actions, because the world should not be monopolised by groups seeking to tamper with the fate of mankind at will.

As for our Hashemite situation, I remember I spoke about that at a big meeting for officers and officials at the conference hall at Al Hussein Medical

Hamzeh, may God give him long life, has been envied since childhood

City. I stressed the formation of a family council to take care of those who are worthy of belonging to the family of the Prophet Mohammed, peace be upon him, and the house of the Prophet.

I have lived through many experiences and I noticed at an early age how some climbers climb onto the branch to ruin the relation between brothers and between father and son, and I swore to myself that this would not happen here in my lifetime. But surely, this has become the objective of every declared or hidden enemy, and all of those have used all means at their disposal to weaken confidence between leadership and people, but they have not succeeded.

Their plan at this stage, together with those who want to destroy Jordan, was to instigate infighting in the ranks of the leadership after they failed to dismantle the base, and they find in my being alive an impediment to all their designs, forgetting that Al Hussein has lived only to gain the blessings of God, to have a clear conscience and to achieve the best for all his people, regardless of their origins, who cooperate in holding the banner high and carrying the message of Jordan with their heads held high, not bowing except before God.

Until that time, I was determined to hand the first responsibility to you, but after you, I envisioned a role for the family council in which to ensure the unity of the Hashemite Family so that when the time came for you to choose your successor, the family would have a great role in naming the most suitable successor, in accordance with the benevolent traditions of Islam.

The most important traits to which young men should aspire are mutual respect, frankness, the fortitude to reject malice, and a quest for knowledge, starting with the honour of serving in the Jordan Armed Forces, the Arab Army, to be a model for young people and to earn the honour that they deserve for their abilities and capabilities.

I envisioned that the council would include all Hashemite Jordanians, including yourself. Prince Raad Ben Zeid Ben Hussein, Prince Zeid Ben Shaker and Prince Ali Ben Nayed, and that all of them would rise to the level expected of them, believing in the importance of their duty and under the threat of punishment for departing from the rules and from a consensus that would achieve the objective and light the right path for future generations and show respect for the country's laws and love for all people, without any injustice or malice. I aspire that the Hashemites would deal with all people as they would wish people to deal with them, removed from envy or greed, refraining from mobilising people against people's own interests without dividing them into followers of this or that and destroying the edifice of Jordanian society in a way that would fulfil the interest of the country's enemies.

I have intervened from my sickbed to prevent meddling in the affairs of the Arab Army. This meddling seemed to be meant to settle scores, and included replacing efficient officers, known for their allegiance and whose history and bright records are beyond reproach. At the forefront were the Field Marshal and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, who was envied because of a house. I am the one who paid for the house. I have collected the money in instalments over years until it was built modestly. Its costs in no way approach the estimates made by many. That was because of his loyalty and his integrity and because we wanted to give him something commensurate with his rank and position, especially that he receives his counterparts from all over the world.

Some people are asking did others receive the same care? The answer is yes. From the meek to the mighty, wherever it was possible to do so.

Perhaps it was wrong at times, but the support of those who deserve it is one of my greatest responsibilities, and [I do] not do it for personal gain.

Excelling students and needy patients benefited.

And then, there is another question.

Where is all this coming from? The answer is I have raised [funds] for my country and my people to ensure their progress and to ensure that they lead dignified lives, through continuous development. All [those funds] went to the objective of national self-reliance and to the treasury.

On the personal level, that was God-given; the result of many brothers in Arab and Muslim nations who are mine too. You and your sister were the closest to me within the family. Your sons and daughters are like my own children: Abdullah, Faisal, Ali, Hamzeh and Hashem.

Hamzeh, may God give him long life, has been envied since childhood

because he was close to me, and because he wanted to know all matters large and small, and all details of the history of his family. He wanted to know about the struggle of his brothers and of his countrymen. I have been touched by his devotion to his country and by his integrity and magnanimity as he stayed beside me, not moving unless I forced him from time to time to carry out some duty on occasions that did not exceed the fingers on one hand. That is how Hamzeh Ben Al Hussein spent his holiday, between his studies at Harrow and his admission to the military academy at Sandhurst, after my insistence.

I order him now, as his father and leader, to continue his studies there without any interruption until he finishes, by God's grace.

As for his brothers and sisters, they have both visited me, leaving behind them on many occasions their families and children for extended periods of time. These visits pleased me, but at the same time made me worried about those who they left behind. Of my family, at the forefront was my brother Mohammad and my sister Basma, who visited me and donated marrow that matches my own. You also volunteered to donate marrow except that yours did not match mine.

As for Noor, she brought happiness to me and cared for me during my illness, with the utmost loving affection. She, the Jordanian, who belongs to this country with every fibre of her being, holds her head high in the defence and service of this country's interest. She is the mother who devotes all her efforts to her family. We have grown together in soul and mind, and she has had to endure a great deal of hardship to ensure that I was being attended to. And she, like me, also endured much anxiety and many shocks, but always placed her faith in God and hid her tears behind smiles. She also has not escaped the attempts of criticism. Why not? [Because there are] climbers who want to reach for the summit, and when the fever was getting high some people thought it was their chance.

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less nights while I was on my sickness, on top of my personal suffering. What made me sleepless for the first time in my life is that I was asking myself why is there insistence on change in the Army since we know the need for reform and development and the Chairman and myself were busy all the time providing our army with all available experience, local and international. I have used my authority as Supreme Commander of the armed forces to stop any action that would have led to the fragmentation and politicisation of the Army. We have ensured that service in the Army would achieve all our ambitions in its continuous development on the strongest basis as a shield for the country and as our pride.

The same applies to the transfer of efficient ambassadors without reason except the reason of age, although those ambassadors represent the king, the state and the country. That's why I returned to the homeland to rectify matters as soon as possible and to assume my duties towards future generations.

I have found that after all these years — during which circumstances and conditions have changed both in our region and at the national level — by God's grace we have achieved a high level of credibility, confidence and international recognition, all of which call on us to continue the tireless and sincere work to provide the chance for young people to serve their country and enrich our march with new vision and new experience. All of this require us to take great care of our affairs and look at the future with objectivity and far-sightedness.

I have received your letter in which you place the matter of succession between my hands and in which you express your readiness to hear my decision concerning that matter. I thank you for that.

I have found that to take a decision, I must refer to the original Constitutional rule, where I find that all conditions that originally dictated the exception have passed, and that, therefore, His Royal Highness Prince Abdullah would, in such a case, immediately assume all duties responsibilities as the Crown Prince of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan.

I thank you, Your Royal Highness, my dear brother, and express my deepest appreciation to you for all the sincere efforts that you have exerted during the past three decades. I thank you for all your achievements in the fields of development, education, intellectual discourse, science and environmental affairs through your overseeing of many programmes at our national institutions. I value in you the spirit of true and genuine brotherhood towards myself, expressed in your generous letter, which I also feel towards you. This reflects what should ever be the case within our Hashemite Family and which should always be a pillar of the Hashemite Family of love and affection, a family which embodies a feeling of responsibility and understanding towards new developments and circumstances of a new era and regards these developments with a great deal of awareness and the ability to deal with them objectively and with selflessness.

I am sure that you are receiving this decision of mine with self content, and with the spirit of a member of the one united Hashemite team. I am sure that you will be relieved of all the psychological and familial pressures. Jordan and the world at large will be your world in which there are so many of issues in many fields that need your knowledge, expertise and deep intellect, and concerns worthy of your tireless efforts and that, by God's grace, will be supported by you. You will always stay close to me as a brother, an intellectual and a man of principle. May God bless you,

Al Hussein,
January 25, 1999, Shawwal 8,
1419.

His Royal Highness Prince Hassan's letter to His Majesty King Hussein

My Dear Brother,
Your Majesty King Hussein,
May God protect you

EXPRESSING MY allegiance, esteem and affection to our King, I would like to recollect with Your Majesty the memory of that day when you appointed me as your crown prince. Since then, and that was 34 years ago, I have been serving my most

Argentine lords of life and death 'getting the shivers'

By David Haskel
Reuters

UNTIL A few years ago they held life-or-death powers. Now they are frail old men hiding behind thick medical files to avoid the witness stand or prison.

Leaders of the 1976-83 dictatorship, when 15,000 to 30,000 people were murdered or disappeared, are now sought by judges investigating the theft of hundreds of babies born in detention centres where their mothers were tortured and killed.

Several former dictators were arrested in the past few months and imprisoned pending trial but most managed to be sent home under house arrest due to advanced age and bad health.

They include former junta members Jorge Videla and Emilio Massera, both sentenced to life in prison in 1985 when the former military leaders were tried for human rights abuses.

Five years later they were pardoned by President Carlos Menem in a bid to

pacify the country, leading everyone here to believe that the military were still untouchable.

But the military rulers of the 1970s, most of them now in their 70s, find themselves facing trial again for baby theft, a crime not covered by the presidential pardon and for which there is no statute of limitations.

Claudio Uriarte, author of "Admiral Zero" on the life of Massera, says it is a bitter irony that yesterday's strongmen who wrote some of the bloodiest pages of Argentina's recent history were now beleaguered, ailing old men.

"It is odd to see those who used to brag about being the lords of life and death over their prisoners getting the shivers and coming up with sudden illnesses," Uriarte told Reuters. "In times like this, when the whole of society repudiates them, the old dictators have been reduced to pleading, pathetic relics of a lost era."

Luis Moreno Ocampo, one of the two prosecutors who got life sentences for the military强人 in 1985, says their

total isolation within Argentine society meant claims of bad health had become their last ally.

"Their basic problem is that they no longer have political clout or influence over the armed forces," he said. "They have to come up with something. They dreamed of getting off the hook for good. Now their nightmares have caught up with them." Massera, a man of athletic build who plays tennis, suffered a mild heart condition after being arrested in November and, after spending a few days in a hospital, was sent home under house arrest pending trial.

Videla, arrested last June, was the first of nine former military chiefs to be detained on child kidnapping charges.

After a short span at a military base he was also sent home.

Both are 73, three years over the minimum age required by law to qualify for house arrest.

Relatives of the "disappeared" and human rights groups have documented

hundreds of cases of children born in captivity at the Navy School of Mechanics, the main torture and illegal detention centre under the dictatorship.

The defendants' lawyers say the legal time for prosecution has expired and that they have already been tried. Prosecutors disagree, saying the former dictators were tried for only six child abduction cases while hundreds of new cases have been discovered since, crimes that have no statute of limitation.

They also say the military regime had a "master plan" to abduct the babies of prisoners in the ranks of its leftist guerrilla opponents and suspected sympathisers and kill the mothers after childbirth. Many of the women were sedated and dumped into the sea from planes in so-called death flights.

The Grandmothers of Plaza de Mayo, a group dedicated to tracking down snatched children, has so far reunited dozens of boys and girls with

their real next of kin.

Former Navy Capt. Jorge "Tiger" Acosta, who used to brag at the School of Mechanics that "we decide here who lives and who dies," turned himself in to authorities in late December after two weeks on the run. Acosta, 56, is too young to qualify for house arrest and was sent to a military jail.

Former Army Chief Cristina Nicolides departed from his old comrades-in-arms' approach by becoming the first to recognise publicly the legitimacy of the federal investigation. But like his colleagues he pleaded not guilty and declared himself too ill to testify before Adolfo Bagnasco, one of the three federal judges on the baby theft case.

In mid-January Bagnasco ordered him arrested at a military base in Nicolides' home town of Cordoba, 700 km northwest of Buenos Aires, and then used an army plane to fly to Cordoba and take his testimony. Argentina's military are not the first

to mix health and court cases. Medical problems were a major argument of former Chilean dictator Augusto Pinochet's lawyers to try to block his extradition from Britain to Spain on genocide charges.

The big difference is that Pinochet still has a lot of military and political influence in Chile. Moreno Ocampo says.

"In contrast, Videla has no control over a single soldier, that's why he has to resort to arguments such as health, which are the ones used by common people." At least one infamous member of the former military regime accused of abducting infants has shown himself to be perfectly fit. In early January, ex-Gen. Guillermo "Birdie" Suarez Mason leaped agilely out the back window of his favourite soccer club's headquarters after dozens of angry fans who had recognised him gathered outside the main gate screaming "Murderer! Murderer!"

Pollution chokes Delhi as people stand idle by

By Masako Iijima
Reuters

EVERY DAY, thousands of ageing buses, shrouded in black exhaust fumes, thunder along the roads of New Delhi, scattering horn-tooting auto-rickshaws and cars.

They rumble past rag-pickers and labourers cooking meals or warming themselves over fires on the roadside, and cover them with a thick layer of dust.

This environmentalists say, is why the Indian capital is fast becoming one of the world's most polluted cities.

"There is not enough being done about it in Delhi, where the situation is grave and there isn't much time," said R.K. Pachauri, director of the Tata Energy and Research Institute thinktank.

"The problem is quite serious now and it is going to get worse," he

said, adding that as many as 2.5 million people nationwide die each year from illnesses related to pollution.

New Delhi Traffic Police data shows there are now 3.3 million cars, trucks, buses and scooters plying the city's streets. In 1980, there were barely more than 500,000.

Environment ministry officials blame the worsening air quality on a sharp rise in vehicles, which they believe account for more than half of the city's pollution woes.

Levels of benzene, a known carcinogen, are 20 times what is deemed safe in Europe, environmentalists say.

The Central Pollution Control Board's plan of attack focuses on eliminating "grossly polluting sources" — old vehicles.

Last year, New Delhi banned taxis, buses and rickshaws older than 15 years. Petrol pumps now

sell only unleaded petrol.

"We have taken small but significant steps," said board chairman, Dilip Biswas. "We measured lead levels in September and October and found that they were 60 per cent lower than in the previous year."

But critics say the government data collected at nine monitoring facilities throughout New Delhi is neither comprehensive nor fresh. The most recent data is from 1995.

Most of the plans are based on almost no concrete, up-to-date information and are too ad hoc, they say.

"Invisible gases can be more harmful than the black ones coming out of trucks and you need to know where the gases are coming from, what they are and who the gases are affecting to set up an effective policy to control it," said one environmentalist.

Officials and environmentalists

said ministries needed to come together to phase out two-stroke engines, upgrade the public transportation system for the city's roughly 12 million people, plant more trees and choose cleaner fuels.

"Controlling pollution... is not an isolated action," Pachauri said. "Banning leaded fuel is fine, but you still have to discourage people from mixing kerosene with diesel to cut fuel costs or it's no use." During the cold months of December and January, the pollution clings to the city. Combined with moisture, it turns the sky a brownish-grey and exacerbates the thick, white fog that always descends on New Delhi at this time of year.

Poor visibility caused traffic accidents and threw train schedules awry in December. Northern Railways, which operates trains in and out of New Delhi, was forced to open extra counters to cope with

long queues of fuming passengers demanding refunds.

At the airport, the heavy fog and a rickety landing system grounded many people's holiday plans.

But despite the health hazards and inconvenience, activists say there is little protest from the community at large.

"More and more people are aware of air pollution now, but when it comes to doing something about it, they back off," says Iqbal Malik, leader of the non-governmental body Vatavarn, which has set up rubbish bins across the city to help keep it clean.

Deepak Singh, proprietor of one of New Delhi's few oxygen bars, said it was also a matter of not knowing what to do.

"The city, government are not doing anything and I am just offering one solution," said the owner of Life Care O2 Bar.

For 200 rupees (\$4.7), close to three times New Delhi's daily minimum wage, customers can snort 93-per cent pure oxygen for half an hour through plastic tubes inserted into their nostrils.

Since opening in August, about 1,200 people, including those with respiratory problems, have done just that.

Singh said he hoped to raise awareness of the need for clean air by offering oxygen free of charge once a month to people unable to afford the sessions.

"People don't know what the alternatives are for the bad, polluted air and some don't even know what clean air is." It won't be until those living in slums start thinking about pollution and worrying about their health that the people will have enough power to pressure the government," he said.

El Nino cost \$90 billion in '98

By Maggie Fox
Reuters

BAD WEATHER not only caused natural disasters costing an estimated \$90 billion last year, but can be blamed for outbreaks of disease ranging from malaria to cholera, U.S. researchers said on Sunday.

Most of the havoc can be pinned on El Nino — the periodic warming of Pacific Ocean waters off the coasts of Ecuador and Peru. The experts told a meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS).

But to make matters worse, La Nina, the cooling pattern that often follows El Nino, kicked in with its own climatic disruptions in April.

"There seems to be a statistically greater number of extreme weather events," Paul Epstein of Harvard Medical School, who helped direct the study, told a news conference.

"Extreme weather events are bad for our health," Epstein added. "Floods foster fungi in the ground, they help encourage mosquitoes, they cause rodents to flee their burrows." Raw sewage gets washed into the water supply as well, he said.

Droughts, too, can also succour insects such as aphids and, again, mosquitoes as running streams dry into puddles perfect for them to breed.

"This past year we have seen clusters

of these diseases in these places where extreme weather has occurred," Epstein said.

His team estimated that weather caused \$89 billion worth of damage in 1998, compared to about \$55 billion for all of the 1980s. Ice storms in California in December caused another \$600 million in damage, so the year's total was easily \$90 billion, he said.

In December, Munich Re, the world's largest reinsurer, said natural disasters caused 50,000 deaths and damage costing more than \$90 billion in 1998, compared to 13,000 deaths and damage of \$30 billion in 1997.

The health of animals also suffered, with direct economic consequences. An outbreak of Pfiesteria, a fish-killing algae, badly hurt fisheries in the U.S. Chesapeake Bay area, costing an estimated \$60 million.

Epstein's team at the Centre for Health and the Global Environment at Harvard Medical School first mapped severe weather events, then overlapped these with reports of disease outbreaks. There was a close match.

"In Latin America extreme weather was associated with outbreaks of malaria, dengue fever and cholera," the report says. "In Indonesia and surrounding island nations, delayed monsoons — and the compounding effects of local farming practices — led to prolonged fires, widespread respiratory illness and significant loss of wildlife."

To make matters worse, La Nina — the cooling of the ocean surface that often follows an El Nino — brought more extreme weather starting in April, including flooding in Bangladesh and China, a cold wave across Europe in December and a destructive drought followed by flooding in Texas.

Epstein thinks global warming is making such weather patterns more extreme. "I think it's a combination of El Nino, La Nina and climate change," he said.

The effects of such weather can prove to be devastating.

German Poveda, a hydrologist at Colombia's National University in Medellin, referred to the El Nino-induced droughts in 1990 and 1991 that brought the country's hydropower industry to a near halt, costing \$1 billion. "That's a lot for the Third World country," he said.

Then La Nina brought heavy rains that damaged the delicate flowers on coffee trees. "We suffered tremendous losses," Poveda said.

Luckily, scientists can now predict some of the effects.

Ants Leetman, director of the climate prediction centre at the U.S. National Weather Service, said many were now forecast three to four months ahead of time.

"El Nino forecasting is the first step in terms of being able to forecast the climate," he said.

Return of the wolf divides Swiss

By Jacques Boyer
Agence France Presse

MORE THAN half-a-century after the last animal was shot in Switzerland, the wolf is back, crossing the alpine frontier from Italy and provoking dissent between ecologists and sheep farmers.

For *C. lupus* has a problem, a taste for lamb, prompting mountain shepherds to look to their guns, even though under the Bern Convention which Switzerland has signed, wolves are a protected species.

Wolves were reintroduced into Italy in 1972, and now number some 450 in that country. It was inevitable that eventually individuals would find their way into Switzerland, as they have into France.

Rumours began to spread in the winter of 1995 in the Val Ferret, a valley of the southern Valais canton, after dozens of sheep were savaged by an animal which shepherds alleged was a wolf.

A drive was organised and a beast wounded, and though no body was found ecologists had little doubt that the farmers were right.

Their suspicions were confirmed at the beginning of last month, when a wolf was found shot dead in another part of the

Valais. And on Thursday a snow plough ran over a lone male blamed for killing some 30 sheep in November and December in the area of the Simplon pass which leads into Italy.

A hunting inspector, Hans Joerg Blankenhorn, said the wolf which died early Thursday was almost certainly the one that killed the sheep as well as several deer and mountain goats.

It was hit by a plough clearing snow on the road between Italy and Switzerland after another plough in front managed to avoid the animal, said Narcisse Seppay, hunting manager for the Valais.

Packs of wolves terrorising people huddled in their snowbound chalets remain a myth, however. "No one in the Valais need fear to go for a walk in the woods," said Philippe Roch, head of the federal office for the environment, forests and the protection of the countryside.

Roch, along with the Swiss-based Worldwide Fund for Nature (WWF), would like to see wolves tolerated by the local people. "We don't want to turn Switzerland into a zoo for carnivores, but we want to live with the wolf," he said.

Roch's department has put forward a series of measures in a bid to cool the anger of farmers, including prompt and simpler steps to obtain compensation for sheep lost, greater use of dogs to guard flocks, and the culling of wolves which slaughter too many sheep.

"We will give this protected predator the living space it needs and manage its existence so that damage caused to domestic animals is kept within acceptable limits," Roch said.

Farmers are less than convinced by the government measures, saying that to obtain compensation they have to prove a wolf is responsible, and it is difficult to protect small flocks scattered over the mountainsides.

There is also a conflict of outlook: farmers say a wolf is a luxury they can ill afford, of no obvious use, whereas a sheep gives meat and wool, keeps the grass down and provides an income.

The authorities, pleading for cohabitation between civilisation and nature red in tooth and claw, try to play down the wolf's depredations.

"In Switzerland 20 to 30 people a year die from bee stings every year," Narcisse Seppay said. "Yet no one suggests that bees be wiped out."

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Japan posts record \$122.7b trade surplus

TOKYO (R) — Japan's trade surplus jumped 40 per cent to a record high of \$122.72 billion in 1998 and posted an unexpectedly large 14.4 per cent rise in December as the weak domestic economy caused imports to jump.

Economists say imports could well stay stuck in the doldrums, but the strong yen will help cap gains in the surplus in coming months by making Japanese exports more expensive overseas.

Japan's touchy surplus with the United States rose by about a third in 1998 to \$70 trillion yen — its highest level since 1987 — and was up 23 per cent in December alone.

But the finance ministry said the value of Japanese steel exports to the United States — a key trade friction flash point — fell 20.8 per cent in December from a year earlier to 23.78 billion yen. The volume of those exports declined 14.9 per cent to 364,000 tonnes.

U.S. steel companies have filed anti-dumping suits against Japanese

steelmakers as well as those from Brazil, South Korea and Russia, and some U.S. senators are backing legislation to make it easier to protect the industry from import surges.

U.S. trade officials have said Japan needs to cut its steel exports to America sharply or face possible retaliation and that they would look at December's data to see if the trend was down.

Deputy U.S. Trade Representative Richard Fisher told Reuters here on Monday that Washington would look at the latest steel data "very closely" but that it was too early to comment.

"The numbers have come down, we are still looking at them and are interested to see the disaggregate of those numbers, which we don't have," Fisher told reporters after a three-hour meeting with Japanese trade officials.

"It is now a matter of evaluating the numbers," he said.

Fisher is in Tokyo for a series of meetings on a long list of trade issues from

apples and rice to insurance, steel, flat glass and auto parts.

Earlier in the day, however, Fisher said sectoral issues should not mute Washington's broader message that Japan needs to cut the red tape that is strangling growth to help get its economy out of a slump.

"The key thing now is for Japan to lift itself out of the doldrums," he told Reuters Television, adding that deregulation and restructuring were what "saved" the U.S. economy.

"There will always be bilateral irritants. We are allies, we are friends. We need to resolve these issues and we will," he emphasized.

Japanese exports overall slipped a meager 0.6 per cent but imports fell 10.5 per cent in 1998. In December alone, exports fell by 12.2 per cent but imports fell faster, posting a 21.7 per cent drop for the month from December 1997.

"The yen is definitely hurting the export side, but even with the stronger yen, the weakness in the domes-

tic economy is driving imports lower," said Ron Bevacqua, economist at Merrill Lynch.

Bank of Japan Governor Masaru Hayami told central bank branch managers on Monday that while the pace at which the economy was deteriorating had moderated due to higher public works spending, companies and households remained cautious and prices were weak.

A finance ministry official said the pace of the rise in Japan's surplus would slow because exports to Asian nations were unlikely to pick up drastically, while import volumes would rise in the medium term as economic stimulus steps boosted demand.

Economists are more sceptical about improving imports but still see the surplus peaking and then staying at high levels.

"In the next few months the effect of the strong yen should start to hit and we will see it (the surplus) peaking out," said Brian Rose, economist at Warburg Dillon Read in Tokyo.

Worries that trade friction

will flare as the U.S. trade deficit balloons to a record high this year has made currency markets jittery about a possible weakening of the dollar.

But the market reacted little to the topic here on Monday.

"I think the biggest reason for the lack of market reaction is that U.S. Treasury Secretary Robert Rubin has said he will not use the dollar as a political tool," said one dealer.

Many economists say Washington may be reluctant to push trade confrontation too far, given that U.S. consumers and many companies benefit from cheap imports and that a big trade bust-up risks sending the dollar down sharply and upsetting Wall Street.

"I think it would be too destabilising, especially if the U.S. economy is strong.

It (trade spats) plays to some quarters politically but it is not going to be the kind of national vote-getter that makes it attractive for any candidate on either side to pursue as a main policy priority," Bevacqua said.

Brazil tries to prevent post-devaluation price war

SAO PAULO (R) — Brazil's economic team battled Monday to try to prevent a sharp currency devaluation that is chilling world financial markets from setting off an all-out price war at home.

While Finance Minister Pedro Malan tried to assure

Brazilians that the country is not returning to the days of hyperinflation, the new development minister worked to convince industry to hold out against the temptation to raise prices.

"We have a strong commitment to preserving the pur-

chasing power of the real and we are already adopting measures...to keep inflation under control," Malan told Folha de S. Paulo in an interview.

Malan reiterated forecasts of inflation "below 10 per cent"

in 1999. The real, once the cherished foundation of Brazil's four-and-a-half-year economic stabilisation plan, lost 30 per cent of its value by Friday, just a week after the central bank decided to let its currency float freely against

the dollar. The real was trading at 1.72 per dollar, but only after the state-owned Banco do Brasil intervened and sold dollars to keep the foreign exchange rate from taking an even deeper dive.

The devaluation has failed

so far to spark widespread inflation, but retailers are already complaining about higher prices from industry.

Manufacturers of televisions, kitchen appliances, stereos and other electronic goods have raised wholesale prices by as much as 30 per cent according to O Globo daily. Supermarkets are also awaiting a new price list from their suppliers, but warned they will boycott unreasonable price increases.

Car makers Volkswagen

and Fiat announced last week they will raise prices on their domestic models between 1.6 per cent and 5 per cent.

In a bid to nip knee-jerk inflation in the bud, President Fernando Henrique Cardoso sent his new minister of development to Sao Paulo in search of informal price agreements.

The desire for personal gain could provoke a general loss for the country, Minister of Development Industry and Trade Celso Lafer warned industry groups. O Estado de S. Paulo has reported.

CURRENCY	JORDAN DINAR	BRAZIL REAL	ILAE DINAR	Bahrain Dinar	QATAR RIAL	Oman Rial	Monday, 25-01-99			ACCESS 4646868
							US DOLLAR	EURO	YEMEN	
JORDAN DINAR	1.0000	3.1887	0.1927	1.6773	1.6389	0.1945	2.3447	0.2077	0.7080	
BRAZIL REAL	5.2650	1.0000	1.0212	5.9485	9.7424	1.0302	12.4222	1.0710	3.7510	
ILAE DINAR	5.1851	3.9753	1.0000	9.7422	9.5403	1.0088	12.1645	1.0776	3.6732	
Bahrain Dinar	5.0525	3.1026	0.1226	1.0000	0.9753	0.1036	1.2495	0.1105	0.3770	
QATAR RIAL	5.0508	3.1026	0.1048	1.0212	1.0000	0.1057	1.2751	0.1130	0.3850	
Oman Rial	5.1407	3.9757	0.9612	9.6568	9.4567	1.0000	12.0579	1.0811	3.8410	
YEMEN	5.1405	0.0805	0.0822	0.8005	0.7843	0.0829	1.0000	0.0888	0.3020	
EURO	5.1845	3.9057	0.5280	0.0467	0.9362	11.2688	1.0000	3.4087		
LEBANESE LIRA	21.4531	4.0556	3.1408	40.3429	39.5044	4.1774	50.3709	4.4621	15.2100	
US DOLLAR	1.4724	0.2665	0.2722	2.6522	2.5971	0.2746	3.3117	0.3234	1.0000	
GERMAN MARK	1.5572	1.6107	1.5641	1.5984	1.5653	1.6155	1.6958	1.6763	0.6027	
ITALY LIRA	2.3826	0.4497	0.4592	4.4741	4.3811	0.4633	5.5885	0.4949	1.6869	
HOLLAND GULDEN	2.3845	0.5057	0.5175	5.0411	4.9366	0.5220	6.2945	0.5376	1.9007	
SWEDEN KRONA	10.9373	2.3644	2.1081	20.1122	21.2485	2.2717	27.7436			
ITALY LIRA	23.5854	4.4523	4.5466	44.2540	43.3760	4.5868	55.3074	4.8604	16.7006	
BELGIAN FRANC	43.1427	2.9757	9.4727	92.2793	90.3667	9.9553	115.2223	10.3071	34.3684	
AUSTRIA SCHILLING	2.2402	0.4226	0.4319	4.2072	4.1700	0.4357	5.0265	0.4554	1.5865	
GREEK DRACHMA	3.9278	0.7414	0.7571	7.3756	7.2227	0.7618	8.2022	0.7854	1.9000	
CYPRESS POUND	2.6635	0.5065	0.5173	5.0393	4.9443	0.5243	6.0205	0.5454	1.7809	
AUSTRIA SCHILLING	16.1622	2.1640	2.3210	37.4766	33.8244	3.2585	39.3032	3.4571	11.8880	
CANADA DOLLAR	2.1508	0.4059	0.4146	4.0383	3.9546	0.4182	5.0424	0.4467	1.5226	
Euro	1.2162	0.2249	0.2348	1.2878	1.2402	0.2369	2.0564	0.2530	0.6025	

CURRENCY	US DOLLAR	GERMAN MARK	SINGAPORE DOLLAR	FRANCE FRANC	JAPAN YEN	HOLLAND GULDEN	FRENCH FRANC	SWEDEN KRONA	YEMEN	CENTRAL BANK BULLETIN
CURRENCIES	1.0000	1.6503	0.9528	0.7265	0.1768	0.6737	0.6201	5.9876	1.1500	
US DOLLAR	1.0000	1.6503	0.9528	0.7265	0.1768	0.6737	0.6201	5.9876	1.1500	
GERMAN MARK	0.6267	1.0000	0.3573	0.4349	0.1065	0.5265	0.3171	3.0095	0.6087	
SINGAPORE DOLLAR	1.6505	2.3791	1.0000	1.2288	0.2862	1.0000	1.0000	1.0000	1.0000	
FRANCE FRANC	2.3791	1.0000	0.3573	0.4349	0.1065	0.5265	0.3171	3.0095	0.6087	
JAPAN YEN	14.4500	10.0000	9.7424	10.0000	0.1036	12.0579	12.4222	12.4222	12.4222	
HOLLAND GULDEN	1.0007	3.1358	0.7403	1.0000	0.1036	1.0000	1.0000			

Daily Beat

A review of news from the Arabic Press

JEDCO has ambitious '99 programme to promote Jordanian products in world markets

THE JORDAN Export Development and Commercial Centres Corporation (JEDCO) will organise seven fairs and exhibitions in a number of countries this year, said JEDCO Director General Farouq Hadidi in an interview with Al Ra'i. He mentioned a "second industrial fair" to be held in Gaza during May and the "first Jordanian week" to be held in Algeria during June.

Moreover, there will be a "first industrial fair" in Libya during September, a "third industrial fair" in Baghdad and a similar one in Cairo during October, a "second Jordanian week" in Washington and an "Arab fair for export development" that will be held in Geneva during November.

Hadidi said JEDCO's participation in general international fairs will be in conjunction with and supporting those that the corporation will be holding this year. He indicated that JEDCO will participate in the fourth Arab-African fair in Dakar/Senegal during April and in the International Expo Fair in Sharjah during May.

Other fairs in which JEDCO will participate this year are the International Damascus Fair in Syria in September, the International Tehran Fair in Iran during September, and the Lagos International Fair in Nigeria in addition to other displays in Bulgaria and Iraq.

JEDCO will take part in three specialised international fairs which Hadidi named to be Foodex for food industries in Tokyo during March, and also Anuga for food industries in Germany's Cologne during October. The third one called Cebit will be for computers and will be held in Hannover in Germany.

Hadidi announced that JEDCO will organise a number of trade missions to several countries during 1999. He said a delegation representing 30 local companies will visit Yemen and another representing 20 firms from construction sector and 18 textile firms will visit the Palestinian territories. In addition trade missions will travel to Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Czechoslovakia, Ethiopia, Kenya, South Africa, the United States, Brazil, Argentina and Chile.

Furthermore, JEDCO will participate in four meetings during 1999 at Cyprus, Austria, Germany and Egypt with regard to the European-Mediterranean partnership. Hadidi said the corporation will also participate in meetings of Arab exporters and importers, especially the meeting in Tunis or Egypt concerning the textile sector, the gathering in Amman to discuss pharmaceutical and chemical related issues and the meeting in Abu Dhabi concerning food industries.

JEDCO will conduct several market studies this year, Hadidi said. The studies will cover the Scandinavian (Sweden and Norway) countries, the east European (Bulgaria and Latvia) states, the African (Nigeria, Senegal and South Africa) nations, Iran and Arab states (the United Arab Emirates, Libya and Algeria).

Technical studies will be conducted on chemical industries (fertiliser, medicines and detergents) in addition to an evaluation study to determine the benefits gained by the companies which have obtained the ISO 9000 certificate and the effect of that on exports.

Finally, JEDCO will be studying the feasibility of setting up Jordanian commercial centres abroad (Al Ra'i).

A.F.M TRADE Monday, 25-01-99 ACCESS 4646868

Company	Open Price	Close Price	Change
BANKS			
ARAB BK	217.750	217.000	-0.34%
NTL BK	1.540	1.530	-0.65%
LK OF JO	1.230	1.240	+0.81%
INDUSTRIAL DEV. BK	1.490	1.500	+0.67%
THE HOUSING BK	2.810	2.860	+1.42%
JO. KUWAIT BK	1.660	1.700	+2.41%
JO. ISLAMIC BK	1.730	1.750	+1.16%
PHILADELPHIA BK	0.530	0.550	+3.77%
BANKS INDEX			
	284.680	point =	-0.04%
SERVICES			
ELECTRIC POWER	1.710	1.790	+4.68%
IRIB ELECTRICITY	1.710	1.800	+5.26%
PORTFOLIO SECURITIES	0.810	0.840	+3.70%
AL-RAI	5.420	5.690	+4.58%
AL-ZARQA FOR EDU	0.910	0.910	0.00%
ARAB INT'L FOR INVEST.	1.960	1.980	+1.02%
UNIFIED LAND TRANS	1.200	1.200	0.00%
SERVICES INDEX			
	113.210	point =	+1.63%
INDUSTRY			
CEMENT	3.720	3.800	+2.15%
PHOSPHATE	2.060	2.160	+4.85%
ARAB POTASH	3.940	4.140	+5.08%
PETROLEUM REFINERY	10.530	11.060	+5.03%
THE IND. COMM. & AGRIC	1.080	1.120	+3.70%
WORSTED MILLS	5.300	5.550	+4.72%
ARAB PHARMACEUTICAL	3.000	3.150	+5.00%
CERAMIC IND	1.140	1.200	+5.26%
TOBACCO & CIGARET	1.240	1.260	+1.61%
DAR AL DAWA	5.460	5.730	+4.95%
MIDDLE EAST COMPLEX	0.550	0.570	+3.64%
JO. STEEL	0.960	0.960	0.00%
ARAB ALUMINIUM	1.900	1.950	+2.63%
LIVESTOCK & POULTRY	0.410	0.410	0.00%
NTL IND	0.360	0.360	0.00%
PETRO - CHEMICAL	0.330	0.350	+6.06%
CHEMICAL & VEGETABLE	1.020	1.040	+1.96%
UNIVERSAL CHEMICAL	1.000	1.050	+5.00%
NTL CABLE	0.640	0.670	+4.69%
SULPHUR - CHEMICALS	0.380	0.400	+5.26%
ARAB CENTER FOR PHAR	1.290	1.350	+4.65%
EL-ZAY	1.300	1.300	0.00%
UNIVERSAL MODERN IND	0.700	0.740	+5.71%
INO. RESOURCES	0.450	0.470	+4.44%
NEW CAPLES	0.630	0.630	0.00%
NTL ALUMINIUM	0.700	0.720	+2.86%
INDUSTRY INDEX			
	96.230	point =	+3.93%
PARALLEL			
EXPORT BK (75)	0.890	0.910	+2.25%
JO. TRADING FACILITIES	0.400	0.400	0.00%
UNION INVEST. CORP.	0.740	0.780	+5.41%
AL - EKBAL	0.800	0.800	0.00%
ADVANCED PHAR	0.540	0.540	0.00%
MEDICAL APPLIANCES	0.380	0.380	+5.56%
AL DAWLAH	0.590	0.590	0.00%
ARAB INT'L TRADE	0.210	0.210	0.00%
OPTICAL & AUDIAL	0.410	0.410	0.00%
NAMICO	0.250	0.250	0.00%
(MIDDLE EAST PHAR) (90)	0.610	0.610	0.00%
UNION TOBACCO	3.030	3.180	+4.95%
AL-RAZI	0.550	0.560	+1.82%
UNITED ENG. INO	0.210	0.210	0.00%
INT'L CERAMIC	0.390	0.400	+2.56%
GRAND INDEX			
	181.55	point =	+1.09%

National Bank of Kuwait posts record profit in 1998

KUWAIT CITY (AFP) — The National Bank of Kuwait (NBK), the emirate's largest bank in terms of assets, has announced a near nine per cent rise in profits in 1998.

The commercial bank's profits rose 6.5 million dinars (\$21.5 million), or 8.8 per cent, to 80 million dinars (\$265 million) in 1998, Chairman Mohammad Abdul Rahman Al Bahar said, without elaborating.

Standard and Poor's rating agency assigned NBK last month an "A" long-term rating, the highest in the Gulf.

The agency cited NBK's prominent position in the Kuwaiti market as well as its good asset quality, strong capitalisation and consistent profitability as the main reasons for the rating.

It said it expected the bank to remain profitable in the foreseeable future. The bank has also received the highest Gulf ratings from other agencies including Moody's and Capital Intelligence.

NBK, founded in 1957, is the Gulf's sixth largest bank and had \$13 billion of assets in mid-1998.

ARIES: (March 21 to April 19) Around the middle of the day, you'll come up with an absolutely brilliant plan. It could be so new it doesn't have a name yet. That's because you're inventing it as you go along. Necessity is the mother of invention, remember? Well, you guys needed to solve this problem, and you're coming up with a unique solution.

TAURUS: (April 20 to May 20) You haven't even thought about borrowing money, because you hate going into debt. You might want to reconsider. Someone in a position to make you a loan has been watching. He or she knows you're a good risk. The only question is how much do you want to borrow and how do you want to pay it back?

GEMINI: (May 21 to June 21) A partner has a brilliant idea. This will help you achieve a goal you've been struggling with all week. You've been trying to get something to happen before the conditions were ready. Well, they're ready now. Go ahead and act early this afternoon, when the opportunity presents itself. Be watching for it.

CANCER: (June 22 to July 21) You'll have a lot of unexpected things popping up. Some of them will be new orders, which is nice. Others will be breakdowns. You might get a little edgy later in the day, not knowing what to expect next. If you go to work prepared for this, you'll be ahead of the game.

LEO: (July 22 to August 21) The problem you had yesterday is starting to look ridiculously simple. It might even look funny. That's because you finally got the joke. Whatever you couldn't see before has suddenly become visible. And that, of course, has made you a much wiser person.

VIRGO: (August 22 to September 21) You are trying to make sure everything gets done properly. That's your default position. You're a natural quality-control inspector, because you keep track of the little odds and ends and make sure it's all done right. That's your assignment, and it's going to be a challenge. You'll do a great job. You always do.

LIBRA: (September 22 to October 21) Chances are good that you won't get a straight answer to question you ask this morning. This person doesn't want you to know everything quite yet. It'll be to your advantage to do some digging on your own. Continue to ask questions around the middle of the day and you'll make a surprising discovery.

SCORPIO: (October 22 to November 21) This is a good day to buy things for the home. The problem is, you might be making a purchase because something just broke. That's likely to happen right around the middle of the day. Be careful then, if at all possible. If you have a dog in the house, that's the one to watch.

SAGITTARIUS: (November 22 to December 21) You've had a couple of tough days, but that should be pretty well over by now. You're feeling a lot calmer. You're also learning a lot more quickly. Go ahead and make decisions now. You can trust your judgement.

CAPRICORN: (December 22 to January 20) It looks like some new information will become available in the middle of the day. That will get you going. Something else might be required before you can have what you want. You want matters to be complete as the work week ends. To make that happen, you're going to have to scurry.

ARQUARIUS: (January 21 to February 19) You like to see the humour in whatever is going on, but sometimes you forget. You tend to get serious because you care so much that things turn out a certain way. Well, maybe there's something to be said for enjoying life. Allow that possibility to enter into your consciousness today.

PISCES: (February 20 to March 20) You try to stay stable and calm, but it will definitely be a challenge today. Things are not only looking different than you expected, but they seem to be changing all the time. Well, not to worry. Everything is probably all going to land butter side up.

Birthstone of January: Garnet — Rose Quartz

Kuwait seeks support for foreign oil role

KUWAIT (R) — Kuwait is working out details with foreign oil majors for investments worth about \$7 billion in its state-controlled oil sector while cautiously securing domestic support for the controversial change in policy.

"This is a phased process and we could reach the next level of pre-qualifying interested firms in months while the state seeks political support for its plan," one Western oil industry executive told Reuters.

In a policy switch after fully nationalising the domestic oil industry in 1980, Kuwait seeks to open fields in the north and west to oil majors as part of a plan to raise oil production capacity in the next century by one million barrels per day (bpd) from a current 2.5 million bpd.

The move faces resistance from some members of the elected parliament who fear it could violate the country's constitution despite widening debate in the country and doubts voiced by influential MPs.

Kuwait Oil Minister Saad Nasser Al Sabagh, trying to win

public and parliamentary support, said oil majors could invest more than \$7 billion in northern oilfields to double their output to 900,000 barrels per day.

He did not give a price tag for the second stage of the plan to offer fields in the west of Kuwait, but said technology held by the majors was crucial to meet production capacity targets.

Sheikh Saud has urged critics to stop bickering and accelerate the decision-making process before major oil firms lost interest and took their investments elsewhere, stressing that Kuwait's low production costs, around \$1 a barrel, made it a very attractive investment destination.

Following talks in Kuwait, Royal Dutch/Shell Group Managing Director Mark Moody-Stuart gave the Kuwaiti approach high marks. He told Reuters in an interview he was confident an accord could be reached after the parties concerned studied the plan and its benefits for all sides.

Some members of parlia-



On the occasion of the Republic Day of India



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Agassi out; Graf, Seles, Hingis, Pierce reach quarters



Andre Agassi of the United States waves farewell to the crowd as he leaves centre court after his fourth round loss to compatriot Vincent Spadea at the Australian Open in Melbourne January 25. Spadea won in four sets 6-1, 7-5, 6-7(3), 6-3. (Reuters photo)

MELBOURNE, Australia (AP) — Vincent Spadea dumped listless fellow-American Andre Agassi out of the Australian Open on Monday, robbing the men's draw of its last glamour player.

While the men's competition has lost its luster, the women set up some sparkling quarterfinal clashes, including Tuesday's battle between No. 1 Lindsay Davenport and No. 5 Venus Williams and a reunion of Monica Seles and Steffi Graf six years after their last match.

Agassi hadn't lost a set in reaching the fourth round but was in trouble from the start as the 24-year-old Spadea won 6-1, 7-5, 6-7(3), 6-3.

"I certainly didn't feel good out there," Agassi said. "I felt way out of my rhythm. Grand Slams are an opportunity to do something great and it's always disappointing when you lose." With No. 5 seed Agassi gone, the men's draw lacks stars and seeds, with only three seeds through to the last eight.

Spadea, who beat Agassi the last time they played in Cincinnati last year, looked like a mirror-image of his older rival. They both have two-fisted backhands, play mostly from the baseline, and take the ball early, trying to move opponents around. Spadea had the edge in every department, and Agassi seemed out of sorts all the way.

"I guess it's the biggest accomplishment to date," said Spadea, who admitted Agassi had been a role model for him.

No. 7-ranked Slovakian Karol Kucera is the highest ranked player still in the draw while Russian

No. 10 Yevgeny Kafelnikov, the 1996 French Open champion, is the only man left with a Grand Slam title.

Spadea will play Kafelnikov, the 1996 German's Tommy Haas in the quarters after his 6-2, 6-3, 7-5 win over Fabrice Santoro.

"Both of us started playing again because we love it," Seles said. "I think we both want challenges like we'll have on Wednesday."

Graf and Seles are both on the way back towards the summit after dominating the game in the late 1980s and early 90s.

American No. 15 seed Todd Martin will meet Kafelnikov in the only quarterfinal between two seeded players. Martin beat Zimbabwe's Wayne Black 7-6 (7-3), 6-4, 6-4, in their fourth-round match while Kafelnikov had to battle all the way against No. 53-ranked Romanian Andrei Pavel.

Kafelnikov was two sets up and then served for the match at 5-3 in the fifth before he was broken. He then broke back immediately to end the match after three hours, 33 minutes.

Four-time winners Graf and Seles stayed fresh for their sentimental quarterfinal showdown by winning fourth-round matches with ridiculous ease.

No. 7 Mary Pierce set up a meeting with No. 2 Martina Hingis by ending Anna Kournikova's misery 6-0, 6-4 Monday night.

Seles and Graf, former No. 1 players, had virtual training sessions on Center Court. They both won in 47 minutes, and left plenty in the tank for their 15th career clash on Wednesday.

No. 2-ranked Hingis got a tough workout from South African Amanda Coetzer before winning 6-3, 6-7 (4-7), 6-1. Hingis struggled with the heat and took a 10-minute break, allowed under the rules, when the temperature topped 28 C (82 F).

"I had pretty much control of the match the whole time but she just ran forever. I had to run her to death," said Hingis.

Graf and Seles are both on the way back towards the summit after dominating the game in the late 1980s and early 90s.

"Both of us started playing again because we love it," Seles said. "I think we both want challenges like we'll have on Wednesday."

Graf has released herself from internal pressure this year in a comeback after a string of serious injuries, and Austrian Barbara Schett failed to put her under any external stress.

"I'm still as hungry as five years ago or 10 years ago. The joy and freshness for the sport are still very much there," Graf said.

"The little difference is that I've had a lot of injuries and had to come back quite a few times and I'm maybe taking things just a little bit easier." Graf, a winner of 21 Grand Slam titles, had everything easy Monday, finishing the match 6-1, 6-1 in just 47 minutes.

Seles extended her unbeaten streak to 32 matches at the Australian Open with a 6-0, 6-3 win over Sandrine Testud of France.

After struggling through a third-round victory over Sabine Appelmans, Seles got her discipline and power back Monday, ending the match with a crunching forehand down the line.

Graf holds a 9-4 lead over Seles in a rivalry which includes six finals at Grand Slam level. They are 3-3 in those matches after Seles won their last Australian Open clash in 1993.

"I look forward to it," Seles said of Wednesday's match.

"Steffi is just playing some great tennis and I haven't beaten her in a long time," Seles said. "I think we both want challenges like we'll have on Wednesday."

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Vincent Spadea of the USA hits the ball for a return to compatriot Andre Agassi during their round-of-16 match at the 1999 Australian Open in Melbourne January 25. Spadea upset the fifth seeded Agassi 6-1, 7-5, 6-7(3), 6-3. (AFP photo)

Kournikova's exit leaves fans heartbroken

MELBOURNE (AFP) — She might be young and beautiful but she's out of the Australian Open.

Russian star Anna Kournikova left her fans heartbroken here Monday, meekly surrendering to France's Mary Pierce 6-0, 6-4 in their fourth-round centre court clash.

But she took with her the adulation of the Australian public and was upbeat about her Grand Slam experience despite a suspect serve that left seasoned tennis watchers gasping in horror.

"I'm very happy with my performance here," she said. "I'm progressing well and have done everything my coach and I discussed."

"I haven't felt any pressure. I'm completely confident about my serve. I'm feeling great about it."

After serving an Australian Open record 31 double faults in her second round win over Japan's Miho Saeki, the 17-year-old has worked hard on the practice courts and restricted it to just five against Pierce.

But her groundshots let her down.

The French seventh seed won the first nine games in only 19 minutes before Kournikova, the 12th seed, called for the trainer, complaining of pain in her right shoulder.

She continued after some massage and held serve for the first time in the match and then broke Pierce.

More treatment followed before she held serve again and then broke the French tennis diva again to get back to 4-5, bringing renewed hope for her subdued supporters.

But Pierce was too strong, clinching victory in 65 minutes to secure a quarter-final with second seed Martina Hingis.

Kournikova said the shoulder was just sore and not serious.

"I've served so much in the last couple of weeks. It's just very sore and there's no major damage," she said.

Pierce said she was happy with her game.

"I didn't really have to do anything special," she said. "I didn't think Anna was playing well, it was pretty easy. I was just playing solid tennis, hitting good serves, making my returns, just



Anna Kournikova of Russia hits a double-handed return to seventh seeded Mary Pierce of France during their round-of-16 match at the 1999 Australian Open in Melbourne January 25. Pierce advanced to the quarter finals with a 6-0, 6-4 win. (AFP photo)

playing well from the baseline."

She said Kournikova had a bright future and told her to work hard and forget about the pressure.

"I know it's difficult, everybody goes through that at one point in their career. I remember when I did," she said.

"You just have to forget about that and just work hard. There's no secrets. Just sweat a little hit, just get down and get dirty and fight for every point. She

has got a great talent and she's going to be a great player."

Kournikova tipped Hingis to beat Pierce, as she did at the same stage here last year, but the French No. 1, with a 5-4 record over the Swiss 18-year-old, has other ideas.

"We always have tough matches and it's always exciting. My power is my strength and just being aggressive and staying on top of her, not letting her take charge of the points."

Sports

Japan investigates Nagano Olympics excesses

TOKYO (AP) — A Japanese Olympic Committee (JOC) inquiry will investigate the 1998 Nagano Winter Games, officials announced Monday as the city's mayor admitted some excesses in its Olympic bid.

JOC secretary general Yushiro Yagi, who is to lead the force, said the team would start investigations as soon as possible, Kyodo News Service reported.

"First of all, I'd like to know if the reports about the questionable acts by the Nagano bidding committee are true or not. Priority will be given to confirming such bard facts," Yagi said.

The inquiry will look into allegations of questionable wining-and-dining, favours and gifts lavished on Olympic officials as Nagano battled for the Games.

Tetsuo Oyama, in charge of international affairs at Japanese Olympic Committee, told AFP the task force would investigate on behalf of the International Olympic Committee (IOC).

Nagano's mayor earlier admitted the Olympic bid had strayed off line. "As I review the manner now, I think there was some excess," said Mayor Tasuku Tsukada, a day after the IOC recommended expelling six IOC members over a corruption scandal.

"We acted honourably in keeping with norms of international goodwill," he told a news conference.

"Some people wanted to make side trips to Kyoto," he said. "There was an atmosphere in which we found it hard to decline requests from IOC members. As I remember now, there was room for bidding to escalate."

Nagano Governor Goro Yoshimura said the buying of votes for the Salt Lake City 2002 Winter Games and the resulting expulsions were "regrettable."

But Yoshimura said he had not sensed anything corruptible" about IOC guests in Nagano. "Salt Lake

City has said it copied Nagano. But I don't believe there was any misconduct in Nagano," he said.

Of the six IOC officials to be expelled, four were known to have visited Nagano before the vote.

The IOC decided at a special meeting in Lausanne to send letters to cities which had campaigned to host the Olympics, asking whether they were approached for favours or gave inducements.

IOC president Juan Antonio Samaranch told a news conference there: "What we have with Nagano thus far is just rumours. When we have some facts, we can begin our investigation."

But the Salt Lake City scandal has also shed new light on how Samaranch was treated in Nagano with expensive gifts, including a Japanese Samurai sword and a fine painting each valued over the IOC limit of \$200. Nagano officials said they were private gifts.

Fury has erupted in Japan over claims by Nagano bidders that the accounts for their two billion yen (\$17.7 million) spending were burned in 1991 after they beat Salt Lake City by a 46-42 vote to win the 1998 Games.

They wined and dined 62 of the 94 IOC members when they travelled first-class, some accompanied by wives, to the Japanese Alps region in the run-up to the 1991 vote.

The visitors were lodged in top hotels in Nagano, Tokyo and Kyoto, entertained by geisha girls and flown in helicopters, according to media reports.

The bid committee footed the bill estimated at some two million yen (\$17,700 per head).

Prime Minister Keizo Obuchi said he hoped the IOC decision would bring back the "spirit of modern Olympics" and cause no harm to a bid by the Japanese city of Osaka for the 2008 Summer Games.



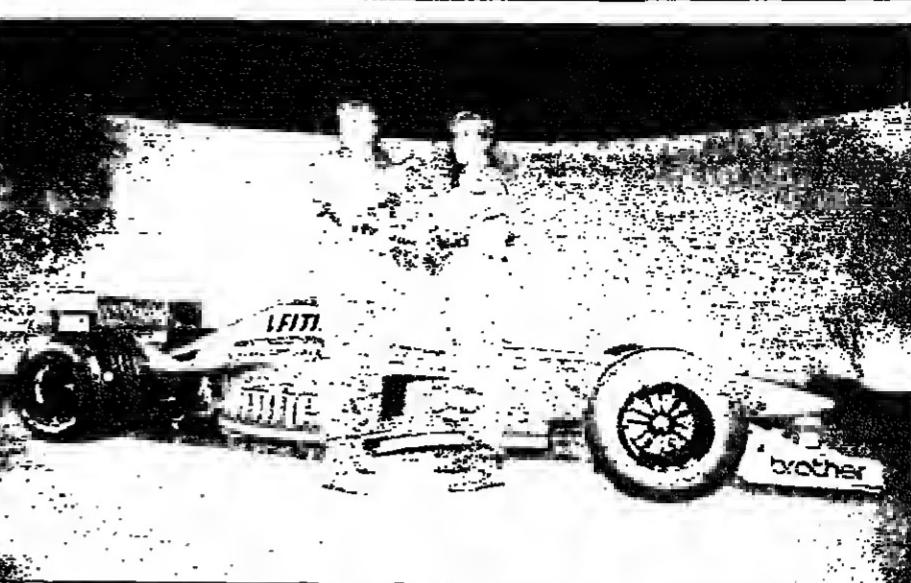
Mayor Tasuku Tsukada of Nagano wipes his face during a news conference in Nagano January 25. Tsukada defended his city to be free of any wrongdoing in the Olympic bribery scandal and said he will make public any future investigations it were to conduct on the scandal (Reuters photo)

A group of five Nagano residents plans to file a law-suit on Tuesday to demand the return of 830 million yen (\$7.4 million) of taxpayers' money which went into the bidding expenses.

"We assume that the official subsidies were spent for such illegal purposes as excessive entertainment and suspected vote-buying," said Kaoru

Iwata, the leader of the group. "The burning of the account book itself backs the suspicion."

Sumikazu Yanaguchi, a former external affairs chief of the bid committee, has told the press he ordered the incineration as "there was no space for storage." He said such records could be "embarrassing" to some IOC members.



Winfield Williams drivers Ralf Schumacher of Germany (L) and Italian Alex Zanardi pose for photographers at a photo call arranged in Barcelona 25 Jan. to show off the new FW21 car ahead of this year's Formula 1 World Championship (AFP photo)

Williams launch new car

BARCELONA, Spain (AP) — Former world constructors' champions Williams on Monday launched the new car they hope will help catapult the team back to the top of Formula One and insisted they would top the podium this season.

The Williams team — despite beginning the last campaign as reigning constructors' champions and with the world champion driver Jacques Villeneuve as lead driver — failed to score a victory for the first time in 10 years.

But new drivers Ralf Schumacher and Alex Zanardi have high hopes for the 1999 model as they prepare to challenge reigning champions McLaren and runners-up Ferrari, who dominated last year.

Team founder Frank Williams said: "We will be competitive this season. We will probably win Grands Prix. The Superjee engine has developed."

The team's technical director Patrick Head was equally confident. Head said: "On fast circuits we might still be 20 or 30 horsepower short but, anyway, it will be no excuse if we fail to win this year."

Schumacher was slightly more cagey, saying: "It has the advantage of being reliable, but it lacks power. We have a reasonable chance of winning races."

Williams insisted the team had banished memories of its annus horribilis, insisting: "This team still has plenty of confidence. We are looking forward for a new opportunity and an exciting season. This is the first time I have seen the car complete and it looks very impressive."

"We are very optimistic about its chances but we will have to wait and see throughout this week and the rest of the season."

The new car's nose has been compared by some to that of the new world champions, McLaren-Mercedes, but development director Gavin Fisher explained: "The cars look alike much more this year. With the rules having changed little, the constructors have optimised the most effective solutions."

Williams will test the car for the remainder of the week at the Catalunya circuit as they prepare for the season-opening Australian Grand Prix in Melbourne on March 7.

Lazio face San Siro test



Defender Cleto Polonia (L) of Piacenza clash with Portuguese Sergio Conceicao of Lazio during their Serie A match in Rome 24 Jan. Lazio won 4-1 (AFP photo)

MILAN (AP) — Holders Lazio may be only 90 minutes away from a place in this season's Italian Cup semi-finals, but first they have to face goal-crazy Inter Milan at San Siro.

All the top clubs in Italy have reached the last eight, but some could face an undignified exit from this week's quarter-final second-leg matches after making a hash of their opening games.

League leaders Fiorentina have to overturn a 3-2 defeat to second division Atalanta, reigning champions Juventus will start 2-1 down against Bologna and high-flying Parma trail 3-2 to Udinese.

Lazio, now second in the Serie A after seven straight victories, managed to beat Inter 2-1 at the Olympic stadium in the first leg.

But with the away goals rule in operation, Inter need only a narrow 1-0

return victory to creep into the last four and on Sunday they rested Ronaldo with the aim of fitting just that.

Inter hope to welcome back the Brazilian ace, but are almost certain to be without Chilean striker Ivan Zamorano, who has pulled a thigh muscle.

His place in a team who have scored no fewer than 15 goals in their last three home games may go to

Nicola Ventola. Inter president Massimo Moratti, who watched Sunday's 5-1 win over Cagliari, said: "We're determined to put on a good show against Lazio.

"It's an important match and I just hope the players show the same level of commitment as they did against Cagliari."

Lazio coach Sven Goran Eriksson dismissed speculation that his team are not really interested in the Italian Cup, given their place in the Serie A and the European Cup Winners Cup quarter-finals.

"Is that what people are saying?" asked the Swede. "Well, it's certainly not the way I see it. I'll go and play myself if I have to."

"I'm not going to take it easy, but obviously if some of the players are tired they could be rested."

Inter will be hoping Eriksson rests Marcelo Salas, the Chilean striker who knocked in both goals against them in Rome and who also scored one and made another in Sunday's 4-1 rout of Piacenza.

Free-kick expert Sinisa Mihajlovic, who increased his tally of dead-ball successes to 18 on Sunday, warned: "I don't want to ease up, not even in the Italian Cup."

"It's going to be a tough game against Inter but

we've got lead and it's up to us to take advantage of it. This team mustn't stop now."

Fiorentina are still in fine form and ought to have no problem overturning their surprise defeat in Bergamo, where the league leaders were sucker-punched by a goal in the closing minutes.

Juventus clocked up a rare victory on Sunday but will struggle against a tough Bologna side who have a one-goal lead, home advantage and the certainty that this competition means more to them than it does to Juventus.

Marcello Lippi's men had been leading with barely 15 minutes to go in the first leg in Turin before conceding an equaliser and then a 90th-minute penalty driven home by Swedish midfielder Klas Ingesson.

The decisive move could be whether Lippi decides to field his new French striker, Thierry Henry, who made a promising debut on Sunday and who would doubtless benefit from playing more.

Parma, like Inter, need only a 1-0 win at home to reach the last four, but will have to turn in a better performance against Udinese than they did in last weekend's miserable 0-0 draw at Vicenza.

"It's going to be a tough game against Inter but

Southampton check out Komljenovic

SOUTHAMPTON, England (AP) — Yugoslav World Cup star Slobodan Komljenovic on Monday began a one-week trial with English Premiership struggler Southampton.

The 28-year-old defender, valued at 2.5 million pounds, will be trying to impress Saints manager Dave Jones with a view to clinching a permanent move from struggling German side MSV Duisburg.

Jones has been given a £6 million pound budget to save Saints from relegation and is desperate to bolster his defence following the humiliating 7-1 defeat at Liverpool

earlier this month.

"We're working hard to bring in new players and I've just been given some prices," said Jones, who faces competition from relegation rivals Nottingham Forest for Komljenovic.

"Now we have to see if we can afford their wages before we go in with a proper bid."

Komljenovic is out of contract at Duisburg at the end of the season. He emerged as one of Yugoslavia's star players during last year's World Cup finals, scoring two goals as he helped his side reach the last

16.

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Mordechai to stand for Israeli prime minister

New centrist party a 'coalition of frustrated closet leftists' — PM

TEL AVIV (AFP) — Sacked Israeli Defence Minister Yitzhak Mordechai officially announced Monday that he will stand for prime minister in May's election as leader of a new centrist party.

"This new team will lead us along a new path. Our priority is the unity of the people," Mordechai told a news conference.

He was flanked by former Army Chief of Staff Amnon Lipkin-Shahak, who has been named deputy leader of the party, former Finance Minister Dan Meridor and former Tel Aviv Mayor Roni Milo.

Mordechai, Meridor and Milo have all left the Likud Party of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to form the new grouping, whose name has not yet been announced.

Mordechai gave few details of his electoral platform, but said "teams have been given instructions to prepare our programme."

He called for the implementation of October's Wye accord, which has been frozen since Netanyahu refused in December to carry out the second of three Israeli troop withdrawals from the West Bank.

He also urged "territorial

concessions" on the Golan Heights, occupied from Syria in 1967.

"Our strategic aim is to achieve real peace on every front," Mordechai said.

"But only a strong Israel led by this team can conduct permanent negotiations to determine the borders of the country while firmly guaranteeing national interests, the interests of security and the settlements, while remaining ready for reasonable compromise with our neighbours," he added.

Netanyahu, who sacked Mordechai as defence minister on Saturday, after accusing him of disloyalty, described the new group as "a party of pols with no political message to offer."

"It's all wind. This is a coalition of ambitious, frustrated closet leftists who have nothing else in common," he said, as he arrived for the primaries in his own Likud Party.

Likud Party members are voting to choose whether Netanyahu or former Defence Minister Moshe Arens should lead the party into the elections.

Commentators say Netanyahu is expected to win easily.

The results of the Likud primary are to be announced on Tuesday.



A MAN AND HIS BIRD: A guerrilla of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), with his pet parrot. Monday searches a bag belonging to a passenger from a bus at a roadblock in San Vicente del Caguán, Colombia, 700 kms southwest of Bogota. The FARC suspended talks with the government, citing its inefficiency in dealing with paramilitary forces in the country (AFP photo)

Mordechai, Netanyahu say talks under way on Lebanon withdrawal

KIRYAT SHMONA (AFP) — Ongoing Israeli Defence Minister Yitzhak Mordechai said Monday that negotiations were under way on a possible Israeli withdrawal from Lebanon.

"There are some kind of negotiations going on but I cannot elaborate upon them. I hope that they will bear fruit," Mordechai told soldiers of the northern command during a farewell tour to the region as defence minister.

He would not say who was involved in the negotiations, adding only that "currently there is a dialogue with various bodies in order to reach an agreement on Lebanon."

"I promise you that we will continue to look for ways to get the army out of Lebanon in a manner that will ensure the security of the people in northern Israel and north of the international border," Mordechai said.

Responding to Mordechai's comments, Netanyahu acknowledged there were contacts under way concerning

Lebanon and stressed that they were under his direct authority.

Sources close to prime minister accused Mordechai of leaking information about the Lebanon talks to further his own election campaign.

At Mordechai's suggestion, Netanyahu's government officially approved a year ago UN Resolution 425, which requires Israel to withdraw from Lebanon where Israeli forces have maintained a so-called "buffer force" for 20 years.

But Israel conditioned any withdrawal on obtaining guarantees from the Beirut government that it will disarm anti-Israel guerrillas in south Lebanon and prevent cross-border attacks on northern Israel.

Mordechai strongly opposed such a plan as a recipe for expanded conflict, with both Lebanon and Syria and on Monday insisted that his view was shared by the top military and intelligence officials.

During his farewell remarks here, Mordechai said it was essential to resume peace negotiations with Syria which were broken off nearly three years ago and indicated this would be a priority if he was elected.

comprehensive agreement involving Israel's withdrawal from the Golan Heights, which Israel occupied in the 1967 war.

Hardliners in Netanyahu's government who oppose any return of the Golan have responded to the Lebanese and Syrian stance by suggesting Israel carry out a unilateral withdrawal from Lebanon coupled with a warning that any future cross-border attacks will meet with harsh retaliation.

Lebanon and its Syrian patron rejected the offer, insisting that the UN resolution requires an unconditional Israeli pullout.

During his farewell remarks here, Mordechai said it was essential to resume peace negotiations with Syria which were broken off nearly three years ago and indicated this would be a priority if he was elected.

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